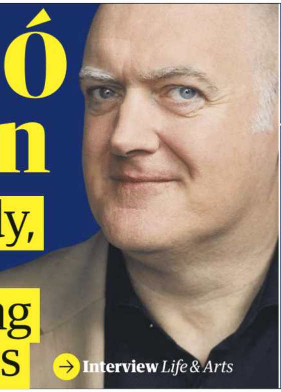
Dara Ó Briain

On comedy, coolness and finding his parents



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The Guardian

Back review on electoral reform, MPs tell Burnham

Exclusive
Jessica Elgot
Deputy political editor

Andy Burnham will face an immediate test of his support for electoral reform in his first week in parliament as prime minister, with almost 100 Labour MPs supporting a bid for a new national commission.

Burnham, a longtime advocate of electoral reform, will be asked to support a new commission into dropping first past the post (FPTP) in his first 100 days as prime minister.

MPs have said the commission must report before the next election and hope to put electoral reform in Labour's next manifesto. No 10 said Burnham remained committed to electoral reform in Labour's next manifesto but stopped short of backing the commission.

New polling of MPs by YouGov suggests the change is now supported by a majority in the Commons. Of those polled, 53% said they supported a review into FPTP, the current system of voting.

An amendment to launch the commission has been backed by 185 MPs, including a number of former ministers and supporters of the previous prime minister, Keir Starmer.

The amendment has been tabled to the representation of the people bill which returns to parliament for its remaining stages on 2 September. A Labour source said: "The representation of the people bill has been designed to deliver our manifesto commitments on votes at 16 and strengthen political donation rules to guard against foreign interference, and that's what the government is prioritising.

"Andy remains strongly committed to electoral reform, and has indicated this is a matter for a future party manifesto, given a mandate would need to be secured for it."

Burnham endorsed the call for a national commission on electoral reform at last year's Labour conference, saying then as mayor of Greater Manchester that he backed "a manifesto commitment to a system of proportional representation to be introduced into Westminster elections in the next parliament".

The 98 Labour signatories to the amendment from Labour's Alex Sobel include

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'I always wanted to be a star. It just seemed natural to me'

Dolly Parton 1946-2026

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PHOTOGRAPH: CATHAL MCNAUGHTON/REUTERS

PM may change law to shake up utility firms

Helena Horton
Kiran Stacey

Andy Burnham is considering ripping up the country's insolvency laws in order to make it easier to bring key utilities such as Thames Water under public control.

Sources told the Guardian that the prime minister is considering a range of options as he looks to deliver on his promise to radically reshape the way England's water and Britain's energy companies are run.

One possibility, according to those briefed on his thinking, is to change laws governing special administration to make it easier to put companies such as Thames Water into insolvency proceedings and then take control of them afterwards.

It could pave the way for what Burnham has said will be a 10-year project to take public control of utilities. However, it could trigger a legal challenge from creditors to Thames Water, who have vowed to fight any attempt to change insolvency laws.

One person briefed on the plans said: "Andy is completely committed to putting utilities such as energy and water companies into public control and is looking at

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Canada to hit US with 'dollar for dollar' tariffs

Leyland Cecco
Toronto

Canada has announced it will impose tariffs on a wide range of American industries including cosmetics, dairy, wood products and outdoor equipment in the coming weeks, as it retaliates roughly "dollar for dollar" against levies imposed by the US.

In a strong Canadian countermove to tariffs levied by Donald Trump, which took effect on Saturday after trade talks collapsed the day before, Canada's finance and industry ministers yesterday called the measures a "focused

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Man says he was framed for murder of journalist in Malta

Yorgen Fenech is accused of conspiracy to murder journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia in 2017
PHOTOGRAPH: DARRIN ZAMMIT LUPI/REUTERS

Juliette Garside
Julian Bonnici *Valletta*

A businessman on trial for the murder of the journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia has spoken about the charges for the first time in court since his arrest seven years ago, telling the jury he was framed by police and had nothing to do with the killing.

During four days of questioning by defence and prosecution lawyers, Yorgen Fenech, 44, accused the most senior adviser to Malta's prime minister of giving the go-ahead for the murder.

Fenech's defence lawyers have sought to identify Keith Schembri, Malta's most powerful unelected official in the years leading up to the killing, as the instigator, alleging he masterminded the assassination of Caruana Galizia, who died in a car bombing in October 2017.

Fenech repeated the claims as he began giving testimony on Friday, after unexpectedly waiving his right under Maltese law to refuse to give evidence at his own trial.

Fenech claimed that Schembri, who was chief of staff to the former prime minister Joseph Muscat, repeatedly leaked sensitive details to him, including advance warnings of raids and arrests.

During a court session on Saturday, the judge asked Fenech: Do you know who the real mastermind is?" Fenech replied "Keith Schembri".

Police have told the jury that Schembri was never a suspect. He was called as a witness during the trial, and has denied any involvement in the murder. The prosecution's case rests on the testimony of the self-confessed middleman Melvin Theuma, a taxi driver who alleges Fenech gave him €150,000 (£128,000) to hire the three men convicted of planting the car bomb.

In his testimony, Fenech spoke of his drug addiction and close ties to senior police leaders and politicians, including WhatsApp messages he shared with Schembri and Muscat.

Fenech said he had come to rely on Schembri, a successful businessman, and spoke to him most days.

Fenech claimed the idea of killing Caruana Galizia was raised during a barbecue at his family ranch. She had written about Schembri having a brain tumour before he had told his family about his condition.

"Keith was very emotional," said Fenech. "He felt very strongly about it. We had to tell him to calm down … It wasn't the first time he spoke about it, he was almost fixated with Daphne … He kept a file with all her articles."

Fenech claimed Theuma, who had attended the barbecue, had wound Schembri up further, saying of Caruana Galizia "she'll reap what she sows".

Theuma raised the subject again two weeks later, Fenech claimed. "Melvin was driving me to the airport. As soon as I got into the car, he told me that he had spoken to some people who told him there was already an active plan to murder Daphne Caruana Galizia.

"He said 'I've spoken to them, they're already working on it and want €120,000.' I was shocked, I told him I'd get back to him. At first I wasn't going to tell Keith, but it kept playing in my mind and I decided to tell him. He said 'go ahead, go ahead, go ahead'.

Daphne Caruana Galizia was killed in a car bombing in 2017

"For Keith it was pure revenge, because he'd say she crossed a line by writing about personal matters."

Fenech's testimony painted a picture of a fixer gone rogue, with Theuma pressing ahead on his own initiative.

After the murder, Fenech claimed Schembri had begun using him to relay messages to Theuma. One message was intended to warn the hitmen of their impending arrest.

The brothers George and Alfred Degiorgio, and their associate Vincent Muscat, were arrested on 4 December 2017. They have all been convicted of the murder, with Muscat confessing his involvement in return for a shorter sentence.

Fenech claimed Schembri had also warned him of Theuma's arrest in 2019.

Fenech also said Schembri had shared a screenshot of a confidential report by Europol, which was helping the Maltese police, listing potential suspects.

The prosecution has relied in part on a series of recordings made by Theuma of his conversations with Fenech after the killing, in which they discussed the murder and leaks about the police inquiry.

Fenech said the recordings had been used to extract money from him. He claimed: "Melvin used recorded calls as blackmail … Keith got to know and panicked."

He said he had handed over €400,000 to Theuma to pass on to the Degiorgio brothers to help pay their legal costs. He claimed the stress had destroyed his family life and his relationship with his wife.

He claimed investigators helped cover up Schembri's role. "I felt betrayed," Fenech said. "You combined Melvin Theuma's lie and a cover-up of Keith Schembri to frame me."

Challenging Fenech's version of events, the prosecution lawyer Godwin Cini asked: "Would I be correct in saying you were the one with the power, not Melvin Theuma?"

The judge, Edwina Grima, later asked: "Why did Melvin Theuma feel he had power?"

Fenech replied: "He knows who the real mastermind is." The judge asked Fenech if he knew who the real mastermind was. He replied: "Keith Schembri." Asked how he knew, he said: "Because Melvin Theuma would mention it and Keith Schembri intimated it."

Ending his cross-examination, Cini told Fenech: "Your fingerprints are all over this."

Fenech is pleading not guilty to complicity in the assassination.

The trial continues.

Transcript and translation
Amphora Media

Continued *from page 1*

Canada announces tariffs on US goods in trade retaliation

response" to what they see as unfair trade practices.

The White House claimed it was using section 338 of the Tariff Act of 1930 to protest against "discriminatory" trade policies by Canada, including provincial bans on US alcohol – a ban that was only implemented in protest against tariffs imposed on Canadian goods last year.

The prime minister, Mark Carney, had vowed a "dollar-for-dollar" response from his government after about 5% of exports to the US were targeted by the White House.

The retaliatory Canadian measures will cover C$27.6bn ($19.9m) in imports and are meant to target important industries including steel, dairy, appliances, agricultural equipment, pulp and paper.

The list from Ottawa has more than 700 items, ranging from hockey sticks to ornamental fish and toilet paper to smoked lobster, with most of the tariffs set at 25% or 50%. A small group of items, including air conditioning units and tool parts, will face a lower 15% tariff. The levies will be effective from 8 September and only apply to goods originating from the US.

In announcing the measures, the finance minister, François-Philippe Champagne, said the country was united in its fight against the US and Canadians remained "masters of our own home".

The industry minister, Mélanie Joly, called on businesses and consumers to buy Canadian goods as part of a broader "resistance" movement in the trade war.

The government also announced more than C$7bn in support for businesses affected by the latest tariffs, adding to more than C$20bn in support announced over the past 18 months.

Earlier on Tuesday, Trump said he was giving "serious consideration" to changing the name of Lake Ontario to "Lake America" – reminiscent of his decision to rename the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America. Others pointed out that Ontario, Canada's most populous province, was named after the lake, not the other way around.

Mélanie Joly asked consumers to buy products made in Canada

Trump's frustration with Ontario in particular stems from his feud with the province's premier, Doug Ford, who called the president a "loser" and the "king of bankruptcies" and told him to "kiss my ass". He also threatened to cut electricity and rare earth metal exports to the US.

Trump called Ford a "flunky" of "governor Carney" and told them "to 'fall in line' or, the consequences for Canada will be far WORSE!"

Trump later alluded to revelations that his negotiators had sought to weaken French language rules, calling it a "lie … made up by a weak and ineffective prime minister".

Seam me up, Scotty! After 60 years of space travel, Star Trek is given a muppet makeover

Crew members La'an Noonien-Singh (left) and Una as puppets in the episode Level-Five Transporter Accident

Duncan Barrett

Space was the final frontier for Captain James T Kirk onboard the USS Enterprise. But the starship's latest crew members are now set to break new ground as Star Trek: Strange New Worlds becomes the latest sci-fi show to embrace the magic of puppetry.

Level-Five Transporter Accident follows in a longstanding Trek tradition that sees the crew undergo unfortunate transformations while beaming up to the ship. This time, thanks to a spot of boldly sewing from Jim Henson's Creature Shop, the Enterprise team are reconstituted into - quite literally - a bunch of muppets.

"I thought it would be a big swing for us, but we spent a lot of time discussing how to do it as a Star Trek episode," said the Strange New Worlds showrunner, Henry Alonso Myers. "Because I knew if it didn't feel like Star Trek then it wouldn't work."

It's a major departure for the Trek franchise, which turns 60 next month. Across nearly 1,000 episodes and 13 movies, Star Trek has always eschewed the art of puppetry - in stark contrast to its cooler, younger sibling Star Wars. Luke Skywalker's mentor Yoda in The Empire Strikes Back was just one of many iconic puppet characters from the original trilogy.

"The Star Wars universe has a very tangible, lived-in quality, which was different to a lot of science fiction at the time," said Brian Herring, a British puppeteer who operated the droid BB-8 in the most recent Star Wars movies.

"Back in the 70s and 80s, George Lucas was using every trick in the book to populate that universe, and that included puppets as well as people in creature suits."

Ever since, sci-fi and puppetry have gone hand-in-glove, from ET to Little Shop of Horrors, Gremlins and beyond. Meanwhile, despite Star Trek's six-decade commitment "to seek out new life", the franchise has remained a puppet-free zone.

"Star Trek made a big commitment to makeup early on," said Dr Chris Nunn, assistant professor of film at the University of Birmingham. "So aliens would typically be played by human actors under heavy prosthetic masks, and that trend has continued."

So why the unexpected course-correction? The answer, it turns out, is less about the magic of puppetry and more about the tropes of modern TV production.

"Doing a puppet episode is a TV concept," said Myers. "One of the things we try to do on Strange New Worlds is go for big swings that haven't been done before in Star Trek." (Hence an all-singing, all-dancing musical episode named Subspace Rhapsody and the part-animated Those Old Scientists.)

▲ *Spock (played by Ethan Peck) is left as the only flesh-and-blood crew member as he grapples with the crew's transformation; left, with Lt Erica Ortegas, helmsman of the USS Enterprise*

PHOTOGRAPH: JAN THIJS/PARAMOUNT+

> ***'If fans like it, let's get them out again. Let the puppets play!'***
>
> **Jordan Canning**
> *Director*

For advice Myers turned to the former Angel showrunner Jeffrey Bell, who worked on the fan-favourite episode Smile Time, which sees its titular vampire, played by David Boreanaz, transformed into a puppet while investigating a sinister Sesame Street-style mystery.

In Strange New Worlds Myers flipped the format on its head, keeping Ethan Peck's Spock as flesh and blood, while forcing the rest of the Enterprise crew to become chaotic, muppety versions of themselves. "Spock was the obvious character to run into this problem," said Myers. "Because he's so logical." The episode's director, Jordan Canning, agrees. "Spock was 100% the right choice," she added. "He's the ultimate straight man."

Like the hit Star Wars TV series The Mandalorian, Strange New Worlds uses a giant LED screen known as the Volume rather than building physical stage sets. Sci-fi actors must be particularly adept at playing make-believe, but according to Canning, the puppets made things easier for Peck.

"The Star Trek cast are amazing at working with their imaginations," she said. "But when you have great puppeteers, you don't really have to work at it. You can't help but feel connected to those characters."

Myers agreed. "The fact that Ethan is physically interacting with the puppets, not just looking at a tennis ball on a stick, makes the whole thing feel more real."

Strange New Worlds is ending next year, and Trek production is now on hold, waiting for the dust to settle from the Paramount-Skydance merger.

In the meantime, though, the puppets are still out there. "They're in storage," said Canning. "I would love to get them out again and make some short films or a web series or something. If the fans like it, let's get them out again. Let the puppets play!"

Star Trek: Strange New Worlds is on Paramount+

Maine coon kitten with 29 toes sets record for cat polydactyly

Ramon Antonio Vargas

A maine coon kitten from Wisconsin has broken a 24-year-old world record for most toes on a cat, setting the new mark at 29.

Erebus Anomaly's story received attention in the US when ABC's World News Now programme covered the Guinness World Record.

◀ *Erebus Anomaly with his Guinness certificate, far left; and showing off some of his 29 toes as a newborn*

Erebus's unprecedented wealth of toes is attributed to a genetic trait, polydactyly, that causes some cats to be born with extra phalanges and, according to a 2016 article in the Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery, is relatively common in maine coons.

Erebus's biological father was born with six toes on each paw, giving him a total of 24, six more than the normal number for a cat, as World News Now reported. Erebus was born in March with eight toes on one paw and seven on the rest.

Erebus's owners, Kendra Vandenbloomer and Hunter Nett of Kaukauna, Wisconsin, later told local news outlet WFRV it was quickly obvious to them that he might attain the Guinness World Record.

Yet Erebus had more to navigate than the record verification process. After noticing that he was breathing through his mouth, Vandenbloomer and Nett learned he had suffered a potentially deadly medical emergency known as an aspiration event, when something that should be in the stomach, such as food or liquid, gets into the airways.

He required a trip to an emergency vet, was diagnosed with pneumonia, placed in an oxygen machine, and underwent a course of medication.

To confirm Erebus had fully recovered, his owners had X-rays taken - also important documentation for the application submitted for recognition by Guinness World Records.

"It's crazy to think that one of the scariest times in his life led right into the beginning of his world record journey," read a message on a social media account created for Erebus by Vandenbloomer and Nett.

The pair run a breeding cattery and were asked by ABC whether Erebus might be rehomed. "He's staying with us," Vandenbloomer replied. "He's a gorgeous boy."

▼ *Drivers queue at a Tehran petrol station amid threats from the US to further economically isolate Iran*
PHOTOGRAPH: AFP/GETTY IMAGES

China condemns threat of sanctions by US and defends trade with Iran

Julian Borger
Senior international correspondent

China has denounced the threat of US sanctions for its trade with Iran, saying any such measures would be illegal and warning that it would take "all necessary measures" to protect its national interests.

Beijing's rejection of the US threat of secondary sanctions for any country or entity continuing to trade with Tehran had been predicted. China buys an estimated 80% of Iran's oil exports and it has defied previous US efforts to limit the flow of revenue to the Tehran regime.

Its statement of opposition raises the question of how far the Trump administration would be prepared to go in confronting China and its financial system in the drive to isolate Iran.

The US treasury secretary, Scott Bessent, on Monday announced an initial set of sanctions on 60 individuals, entities and vessels for alleged involvement in trade with Iran, but there were no Chinese financial institutions on the list despite their involvement in the Iranian oil trade. The omission reflected US caution.

Asked why the Trump administration had not declared immediate sanctions and had stopped short of naming potential sanctions targets, Bessent replied: "Why would I want to blow up the global financial system?"

Financial and trade experts say the administration is well aware of the risk of Chinese retaliation before a scheduled summit next month between Donald Trump and his counterpart, Xi Jinping.

China could strike back through financial markets or with limits on its export of critical minerals.

The spokesperson for China's foreign ministry, Lin Jian, said yesterday: "Cooperation between China and Iran has always been conducted within the framework of international law and should not be interfered with or disrupted.

"China has already stated many times that it firmly opposes illegal unilateral sanctions. China will take all necessary measures to firmly safeguard its own rights and interests."

Iran's economy has been wrecked by the war and the US blockade, but it maintained its defiance in response to Bessent's threats of total isolation.

The economy minister, Ali Madanizadeh, said on state television: "Our defence is no longer so defensive; the enemies should wait for an attack."

An oil tanker was reportedly hit

Iranian oil's biggest buyer
Will sanctions hurt Beijing?

How much oil does China buy from Iran?

Through the early weeks of the war, Iran continued to ship to China, with Beijing's imports of Iranian crude slipping only marginally, according to Kpler ship-tracking data, from 1.57m barrels a day in February to 1.47m barrels a day in March.

Since then, imports have dropped dramatically. The US renewed its blockade of Iran's ships and ports in July. Shipments fell to 785,000 barrels a day in June – the lowest since February 2023 – but then rose slightly in July to 823,000, provisional Kpler data showed. The intake so far in August has dropped to 534,000.

Who are the Chinese buyers?

Chinese independent refiners have been the main Iranian crude buyers, attracted by what has typically been a substantial discount. Known as "teapot" refineries, they survive by buying cheap crude wherever they can, turning it into petrol and diesel for neighbouring provinces.

China's big state refiners have shunned Iranian oil since 2019, when the US reimposed sanctions on Tehran, because they do not want to be cut off from the US dollar-based international financial system. But the teapot refineries, which cater to a domestic market, have no such qualms.

Have previous US sanctions been effective?

Washington has intensified its efforts to clamp down on Chinese purchases of Iranian oil since Donald Trump returned to the White House early last year, imposing sanctions on mostly smaller Chinese refiners and other participants in the supply chain, which have in some cases proven disruptive.

The US Department of the Treasury has also warned two larger Chinese banks that they could face secondary sanctions if Iranian funds were found to be moving through their systems, but it has stopped short of designating them.

In the past, however, sanctions themselves have proved ineffective at slowing the overall flow of Iranian oil into China.
Guardian staff and agencies

▲ *Donald Trump and Xi Jinping discussed trade and bilateral relations during a visit to Beijing in May* PHOTOGRAPH: WHITE HOUSE/SHUTTERSTOCK

yesterday by an unidentified projectile at the mouth of the strait of Hormuz. The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations Centre said the crew was safe and no environmental damage was immediately apparent. Only two commercial vessels were reported to have successfully made the transit through the narrow waterway on Monday.

Iran and Oman, which sits on the southern shore of the strait, held talks yesterday aimed at agreeing joint management of the waterway between the two countries. Oman's foreign minister, Badr al-Busaidi, said after the discussions had concluded that there were hopes that a temporary agreed route through the strait would be announced soon.

A Pakistani delegation was also in Tehran, leaving yesterday after a day's talks with Iranian leaders. The delegation was headed by the army chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir, who has led Pakistan's mediation efforts in the Iran conflict.

The Pakistani military said the Tehran talks were focused on reopening the strait of Hormuz. A memorandum signed by the US and Iran in June was intended to reopen the strait pending further negotiations but the deal collapsed within weeks.

The declaration of what Bessent called Operation Economic Outcast suggests that the prospects of a resolution to the conflict with Iran are still remote. It also suggests a lean towards economic measures and away from military force after a six-month war that has not brought about the intended Iranian capitulation.

Oil prices fell about 4% to a one-week low yesterday after the US sanctions announcement, as traders appeared to see economic pressure as posing less risk to oil supplies than further military escalation. But the price per barrel of about $87 remained far above the prewar average.

The US defence secretary, Pete Hegseth, insisted that further military action was not off the table. "By no means are we foreclosing using kinetic strikes anywhere in the strait of Hormuz or around Iran," Hegseth said on Monday.

Bessent called the US sanctions campaign "unprecedented" and compared it to the D-day Normandy landings, a turning point in the second world war.

"Today, in that same spirit, we are launching an economic onslaught against Iran's financial connections around the globe," he said. "Our objective is to sever every economic lifeline that sustains this tyrannical regime until Tehran stands alone."

He said the US had identified those that continued to deal with Iran and each violator would be given a deadline to cut ties or face US sanctions. He said the deadlines imposed would depend on individual circumstances.

"Any entity that facilitates money laundering on behalf of Iran will be removed from the US dollar system," he said. "The clock just started ticking."

Bessent said Trump was "making phone calls to world leaders with specific requests to cease their interactions with the regime", but he did not specify whether the US president would talk to Xi.

Sina Toossi, a senior non-resident fellow at the Center for International Policy, said: "After nearly six months without a military or diplomatic victory, Washington appears to be trying to accomplish through intensified economic strangulation what military force has so far failed to achieve. But Tehran is answering that zero-sum approach with one of its own."

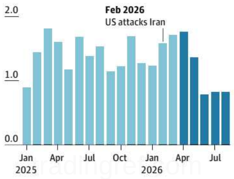
In apparent anticipation of the US measures, the United Arab Emirates, a close US and Israeli ally, announced it was suspending trade ties with Iran. Turkey, another trading partner of Iran, which has been critical of the US-led campaign, has yet to respond to the US threat of sanctions.

Andrew Miller, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, said: "This war has brought the United States no closer to eliminating Iran's nuclear programme or crippling the Iranian regime. But while sanctions can be effective, it is highly unlikely they will produce a quick settlement favourable to the United States."

Iranian oil exports to China

Million barrels a day

● Strait of Hormuz blockaded by the US



Source: Kpler. Note: the US lifted its blockade between 18 June and 14 July 2026

Analysis

Patrick Wintour

Iran may have to strike a deal to avoid strait of Hormuz losing its value

Is the strait of Hormuz – recently cited by the office of the Iranian supreme leader as "the pillar of Iran's new security order" and as transformative as possessing a nuclear weapon – becoming a fast-diminishing asset, leaving Iran vulnerable to the new planned US wave of economic sanctions?

It is the key debate raging inside Iran, with many conclusions being drawn for the country's negotiating strategy. Those who warn the strait's value as a chokehold on the world economy will erode, leaving the country without foreign exchange reserves, naturally argue Iran's negotiators should seek a deal soon.

One analysis written by Hamed Paktinat, the founder of the Community of Economic Activists Association, suggests the construction of alternative pipelines and export routes by Iran's Gulf neighbours will halve the strait's strategic value within three years.

Those who worry about wasting assets inevitably set store by the separate visits this week to Tehran of Oman's foreign minister, Badr Busaidi, and Pakistan's army chief, Asim Munir. These two men are critical to renegotiating the terms for the re-opening of the strait and the revival of the discarded memorandum of understanding agreed by the US and Iran in June.

The Iranian president, Masoud Pezeshkian, and parliamentary speaker, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, have recently made unusually blunt comments about the need to end the war – and the economic consequences of continuing it. Ghalibaf said regardless of how much military power Iran possesses, "if people are hungry" and there is no economic growth, the country cannot endure. Security, he argued, cannot be sustained without a functioning economy.

Pezeshkian was even more blunt: "The war must end at some point," he said. His argument was that Iran should end the conflict now, while Tehran still believes it is negotiating from a position of strength, rather than wait until its position weakens.

The Iranian central bank governor, Abdolnaser Hemmati, also recently went on TV to warn of the economic pressures. "We are facing four or five major challenges simultaneously, including maximum sanctions, blockade, cutting off oil exports, and a budget imbalance, each of which puts pressure on the economy," he said. "One of the neighbouring countries told me that if one-fifth of what happened in your country happened in our country, we would not be able to govern the country."

What is driving these remarks is the pressure on ordinary people in Iran, and an acceptance that the strait cannot become a permanent security doctrine in itself.

Hamid Asefi, a Tehran-based journalist, is one of many warning that if Hormuz is to be played as Iran's final card every time a crisis arises, this card will gradually lose its value. "A threat that is constantly repeated turns from 'deterrence' into a political habit; and a political habit, if not accompanied by concrete achievements, sooner or later leads to an inflation of threats," he said.

One analysis suggests the construction of alternative routes by Iran's neighbours will halve the strait's value within three years

The main question is no longer whether Iran can close Hormuz, he wrote, but if Iran closes Hormuz to the world, does it open the door to power for itself or lock part of its power behind that door? "This is the Hormuz paradox."

That does not imply the lever is currently valueless. Far from it.

According to data compiled by the ship trackers Kpler, only 112 oil and gas tankers crossed the strait of Hormuz between 1 and 19 August. Almost 79% used unconfirmed routes, 19% used Iran's preferred northern route and 2% used the Omani route. Many of the ships that used the unknown routes probably turned off their transponders and used US protection along the Oman route.

It also appears that – aided by the US government – Saudi, Emirati, Qatari and Kuwaiti oil companies have chartered a small group of oil tankers to take cargo through the southern route to the Gulf of Oman where they offload the oil to waiting tankers owned by their customers. Much of the risk is then transferred from shipping companies and oil customers to the more highly motivated state oil producers and to the US government. Iran has drawn up a blacklist of about 48 ships that it will try to ban or fine.

But the US is probably exaggerating the impact of these work-arounds. Chris Wright, the US secretary of energy, claimed the US navy has assisted in the transfer of more than 15m barrels of oil and other products. He also claimed the average daily transfer of oil through the strait was now more than 8m barrels, but even this figure is less than half the prewar average and is anyway seen as inflated. Most ship data trackers estimate the daily figure at closer to 6m barrels a day.

Arsenio Dominguez of the International Maritime Organization dismissed Trump's claim that the US navy had opened the strait, telling Bloomberg: "Given the very small number of ships that transit the strait of Hormuz, it is clear that this strait is, in practice, not open."

Trump has countered that all mines in the strait have been removed leaving Iranian drone and naval attacks as the chief threat.

But the fact the strait accounted prewar for 20% of oil and oil-related products is serving as a catalyst for the restructuring of the global energy infrastructure. Countries in the Persian Gulf are now rapidly building a network of alternative pipelines, with the aim of protecting their exports.

In the meantime, the US will try to turn Trump's boast that the Iranian economy has collapsed into reality. It will try once again to block the vital arteries of the Iranian government across five key sectors: gold, cryptocurrency, technology, shipping and aviation.

Success is not guaranteed, as Trump must know from the failure to defeat Iran in his first term. But chipping away at Iran's economic resilience until the strait becomes an irrelevance may be Trump's only remaining option.

▲ *Iran and Oman held talks yesterday aimed at agreeing their joint management of the strait of Hormuz* PHOTOGRAPH: MAJID ASGARIPOUR/REUTERS

Andrew Tate rented supercars to appear 'uberwealthy' for clicks, says his lawyer

Rajeev Syal

Andrew Tate rented supercars and borrowed a yacht to appear "uberwealthy" and generate online engagement, his lawyer has said.

Legal representatives for the self-described misogynist social media influencer and his brother, Tristan Tate, have claimed the pair portray themselves as far wealthier than they are because their "business model depends on online attention".

British police are seeking the brothers' extradition from the US over an investigation into rape, assault and facilitating trafficking for sexual exploitation.

They were arrested last month and have continued to protest their innocence on X from the federal detention centre in Miami, Florida.

In a court filing, their lawyers said: "Andrew and Tristan are social media personalities. Their business model depends on online attention.

"The outrageousness of the posts by them and about them is the point. The more hyperbolic and outlandish the post, the more likely it will generate views and likes, which in turn generates income. In short, they are playing a role."

The brothers' legal representatives said images of luxury yachts, supercars and expensive watches shared by the duo online should not be taken as evidence of their wealth.

They added: "A promotional video filmed aboard a yacht is not evidence of title to the yacht. The 'superyacht' does not belong to the Tates. They received payment to promote the ship on social media.

"Further, the Tates are engaged in several businesses 'teaching' men how to earn money. It is in their interest to portray themselves on social media as uberwealthy.

"For example, the $2.1m [£1.5m] Aston Martin and $5m and $7m Bugattis featured in Tristan's videos were rented. The valuation of Andrew's watch collection is based on a third-party enthusiast publication."

The filing mentions Andrew Tate's X account and suggestions his posts generate nine-figure sums, as well as his past claims that he would one day be Britain's prime minister. "All of these posts are hyperbole," his lawyers wrote.

▲ *Andrew Tate drives a Ferrari in Bucharest in 2024. Right, Tate and his brother, Tristan, left, are being held in a federal detention centre in Miami, where they are fighting extradition*

PHOTOGRAPHS: DANIEL MIHĂILESCU/ GETTY IMAGES

Several social media posts by the brothers contain suggestions of unlimited crypto and cash resources. His lawyers said these were not true.

The filing referred to a "so-called Mexican 'passport' bearing the name 'Vladimir Scorpius'", which the Tates' lawyers said was nothing more than a "cardboard prop Tristan used for a Halloween costume".

They added: "No one can seriously suggest that Tristan adopted a covert identity, with the purpose of evading international law enforcement, under the name of a famous fictional supervillain."

Andrew Tate, 39, and Tristan Tate, 38, were arrested in Miami on 18 July. Britain's Crown Prosecution Service said on 19 July it had brought 38 new charges against the two relating to alleged offences involving four alleged victims between July 2010 and August 2017. These were in addition to 21 existing charges.

Separately, Andrew Tate is being sued in England by four women over allegations of sexual violence, with the former professional kickboxer's lawyers previously telling the high court there was a "total denial of wrongdoing".

Three of the women bringing the civil case reported allegations of rape and sexual assault against Tate to Hertfordshire police in 2014 and 2015, but prosecutors then dropped the case.

The civil trial was adjourned in May after the force said it would reinvestigate the alleged offences.

The brothers are also facing legal proceedings in Romania and were due to be extradited to the UK when those proceedings concluded, after Bedfordshire police secured European arrest warrants for the pair in 2024.

Andrew Tate wrote on Monday that he would fight extradition. "My life is a movie and I'm my own stuntman," he wrote on X.

Continued *from page 1*

Burnham may change law to help bring utilities under public control

every option for how to achieve that. The special administration regime [SAR] is one potential roadblock and his team is examining how they might have to change it to deliver on their promises."

A government source said: "Our water industry has not been working for people for far too long. That's why this government is looking at how we can give the public more control and help keep bills as low as possible."

Burnham promised in his first speech as prime minister to "build a new economy where we put life's essentials back under stronger public control to make them affordable to you again".

In June he said he favoured public ownership for Thames Water, which is struggling with a £20bn debt. Burnham was expected to make a speech on the water industry in his first few weeks in power but was briefed by Downing Street officials on how expensive and legally fraught it could be to take public control of companies such as Thames Water.

Ministers denied reports yesterday that Burnham had "shelved" plans to take Thames into administration, but officials admitted they were now taking their time to look at every possible route for doing so – including legislative change.

Matthew Pennycook, the housing minister, said: "We are taking no options off the table when it comes to Thames Water … The water industry has been failing people for too long. We've seen rising bills while the number of serious pollution incidents are off the scale. We've got to do more."

Officials say there are two big problems with SAR. The first is that companies can be taken into administration only if they are insolvent or unable to provide a basic level of service. Thanks to support from a group of creditors hoping to take ownership of Thames, neither of these apply.

The second is that once a company enters administration, the administrator is under a legal duty to maximise returns to the creditors, meaning it will be difficult for the government to take ownership without paying a significant price. The process is likely to be legally difficult because many of the creditors are US-based hedge funds with a history of taking an aggressive legal approach to protecting their investments.

One possible solution is to use the water bill to change the terms of the special administration regime. The plan has been put together by a group of Labour backbenchers, including the former environment committee members Helena Dollimore and Andrew Pakes, and the Good Growth Foundation thinktank.

They are suggesting amending the water bill to introduce new triggers for special administration, including lower financial ones and new environmental metrics.

They have also suggested a "bail in" mechanism, similar to that imposed on the banks after the financial crisis. This would force shareholders and creditors to be fully exposed to losses first, thus protecting taxpayers, and give ministers the power to impose losses on shareholders and debt reduction on creditors. The process would be run by regulators rather than the courts, to speed it up.

Praful Nargund, the director of the Good Growth Foundation, said: "By putting emergency legislation in place now, we can avoid litigation and ensure the special administration regime protects taxpayers, employees and customers from paying the price for shareholder failure."

Pakes said: "The challenge is stopping Thames driving the cost of a SAR up through legal challenges and making sure the costs are fairly represented. The difficulty of the SAR process highlights the failure of regulation to create the incentive for water companies to act faithfully."

A source close to the Thames creditors said: "Rejecting a fully funded £10bn turnaround plan and using legislation to force Thames Water into special administration and a new unfinanceable ownership model would be unprecedented and have an extremely negative read across to other struggling water companies.

"It will only result in litigation and the transfer of huge costs and risk to customers and taxpayers, while irretrievably damaging investor confidence in UK-regulated sectors."

Thames Water

◀ *Ministers denied reports that Burnham had shelved plans to take Thames Water, which is £20bn in debt, into administration, but the process is likely to be legally fraught*

PHOTOGRAPH: VUK VALCIC/ SHUTTERSTOCK

Yes they can-can Members of the Zurich Opera dance during a rehearsal of Verdi's A Masked Ball at the Festival theatre yesterday ahead of its premiere as part of the Edinburgh international festival today.

PHOTOGRAPH: JANE BARLOW/PA

Complaints triple about England's 'complex and inconsistent' services for autism and ADHD

Sarah Marsh
Consumer affairs correspondent

Complaints about autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder services in England have more than tripled in five years, official figures show, with the NHS ombudsman warning of years-long waits and patients paying thousands of pounds for private care.

One woman was removed from an ADHD medication waiting list without warning after almost four years, leaving her without the support she needed for about six months. Another patient was given an autism assessment lasting just 50 minutes that failed to follow guidance from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence.

Complaints rose from 410 in 2021-22 to 1,257 in 2025-26, an increase of more than 200%.

Demand for ADHD and autism assessment and support services has surged across England, with open NHS referrals reaching roughly 562,000. More than 60% of adults and children face waiting lists exceeding a year.

The parliamentary and health service ombudsman, Paula Sussex, said ADHD and autism services were "under significant pressure, with demand outstripping capacity", adding: "While commissioning cannot solve these supply constraints, the way services are designed, commissioned and delivered can compound the pressure people experience and make it harder to make the best use of available resources."

She said: "Right now, the system is too complex and inconsistent, leaving too many patients falling through the gaps."

In a new report, Improving ADHD and Autism Services: Commissioning With Confidence, the ombudsman shared findings based on 3,000 complaints. The report found recurring issues, including uncertainty around patients' rights to choose a provider. Other problems included the inconsistent recognition of diagnoses across NHS and independent providers.

> ***'People should not have to fight their way through a confusing system'***
>
> **Paula Sussex**
> *Ombudsman*

In one case, Rich, 48, asked to be referred to Psychiatry UK for his ADHD treatment. NHS South East London integrated care board denied Rich's request and wrongly insisted he be referred to a local service which was still being developed and had no opening date. His NHS treatment was delayed by five months. Rich felt he had no choice but to pay for private care amounting to almost £4,000.

In another case, South London and Maudsley NHS foundation trust removed a woman from the ADHD medication titration (the process of adjusting medication to find the right balance) waiting list without warning or valid reason, leaving her without specialist monitoring support for about six months.

The ombudsman's office itself has a six-month waiting time because of the rise in complaints.

A government spokesperson said: "Last December, we asked clinical psychologist Prof Peter Fonagy to lead an independent review, examining the prevalence of – and support for – ADHD, autism, and mental health conditions. Prof Fonagy's final report will be published later this summer, and will inform our new national approach in this area."

Boy injured in zoo crocodile pen has left hospital, his parents say

Jamie Grierson

A three-year-old boy who was seriously injured in a zoo's crocodile enclosure has been discharged from hospital and is settling back in at home, his family has said.

The child returned home a few weeks ago and was "happy to be home, playing with his toys, sleeping in his own bed and being a big brother", his parents said in an update posted online.

The child was allegedly thrown into one of the crocodile enclosures at the zoo, Johnsons of Old Hurst, near Huntingdon in Cambridgeshire, on 18 June.

A 30-year-old man from Norfolk was arrested on suspicion of attempted murder after the incident and was later released on bail as police said he was "assessed as not being fit for interview".

In an update shared on a GoFundMe page this week, the boy's family said it was "nice to have us all back together in the comfort of our own home".

The fundraising page was set up to support the family financially and help the boy's recovery and rehabilitation. It has raised more than £113,000 to date.

"Now that we are home, our son's rehabilitation journey continues and we can focus on ensuring our son has the best possible chance at recovery," his parents said.

"Both of us will continue to stay by our son's side as we support him on his rehabilitation journey. We attend the hospital frequently to find out the next steps and we work on them together as a family.

"All of his immediate surgeries are over with for now, which means we can now focus on rehabilitation at home."

They said the money donated so far "has supported us financially to cover immediate costs such as our bills and mortgage", and "also allowed us to cover our loss of wages during this time".

In a previous update, the family said the boy had undergone seven operations.

Billie Piper stalker who breached his prevention order is jailed

Steven Morris

A fan obsessed with Billie Piper has been jailed for 12 months after breaching a stalking prevention order.

Philip Jerome, 49, had a sexual interest in the singer and actor and repeatedly tried to get in touch with her, a court in Hampshire was told.

The court heard that Jerome, from Winchester, had been attempting to make contact with Piper for more than eight years. He was made subject to a restraining order in 2018 after attending Piper's home, posting cards through her door and sending her letters by post.

Jerome breached this order within months by sending messages on Facebook to the star's mother and sister. He also attended Piper's home and made comments about her choice of partner.

In 2022 Jerome was jailed after turning up at a pop culture convention where he posed for a photograph twice on the same day with Piper, wearing different clothing. In the same year, he was made subject to a stalking prevention order.

The court heard police carried out an inspection of Jerome's devices in December 2025 and found four images of Piper saved on his phone, and that he had tagged 11 posts and images on X relating to her.

Anisa Alrubaie, prosecuting, told the court: "There are several instances where the defendant has been attempting to communicate with her by tagging her on X."

Sentencing Jerome at Basingstoke magistrates court, the district judge Kirsty Allman told him: "You have a sexual interest in Ms Piper. The motivation is to contact her in the hope she will engage in a relationship with you. This is delusional. You demonstrated an entrenched pattern of stalking and harassment offences, and failing to comply with court orders."

Caroline Bonavia, defending, accepted Jerome had shown a lack of remorse and empathy but said he had sought psychological support to stop him seeking "obsessive and unsuccessful relationships". She accepted that Piper had suffered because of Jerome's behaviour over the years.

Jerome pleaded guilty to four counts of breaching a stalking prevention order.

▲ *Billie Piper has starred in shows such as Doctor Who and Wednesday*

▲ *Parton with her creative partner Porter Wagoner, for whom she wrote I Will Always Love You, in Nashville in 1968* PHOTOGRAPH: MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY

Dolly Parton, country music legend and generous patron of good causes, dies aged 80

Ben Beaumont-Thomas

Dolly Parton, one of the greatest singer-songwriters in country music who was also much cherished for her philanthropy, has died aged 80.

The star's death was announced by her nephew Brian Seaver on Instagram. "I have imagined the heaviness of this moment but haven't truly felt it until now," he said. "It is an honour, an honour that is mixed with absolute pride and great sadness."

So gifted that she wrote two of the 20th century's greatest songs – Jolene and I Will Always Love You – in a single day, Parton's songwriting was characterised by its vivid storytelling, emotional acuity and melodic strength, all sung with strident clarity.

From a catalogue of hundreds of songs, she scored a record 25 US country No 1 singles and 47 albums in the country Top 10 . She crossed over into the pop charts with 9 to 5, a US No 1 in 1980; balanced her music career with acclaimed acting, twice earning Golden Globe nominations for her roles; and her Imagination Library literacy scheme donated more than 150m books to children.

This was all done with considerable panache, rhinestoned glamour and towering hairdos, with her immortal assertion regarding her appearance – "it takes a lot of money to look this cheap" – the most quoted example of Parton's ready wit.

Parton was born into poverty in a one-room cabin in Tennessee, the fourth child to a mother who would have 12 children by the age of 35, and a father who was a farmer and construction worker.

One of her best-loved songs, Coat of Many Colours, was about her mother creating patchwork clothes; Parton's first guitar was cobbled together from a mandolin with bass guitar strings. Her first proper guitar was given to her aged eight by her uncle, and she went from singing in church to appearing on local TV aged 10, to cutting her first record aged 13.

That year she appeared at the Grand Ole Opry, the concert hall in Nashville at the centre of country music, and her performance was introduced by Johnny Cash. "I've always believed things would go well, and I dreamed that they would even before I was in high school," she later said. "I always wanted to be a star. It just seemed natural to me."

After graduating from high school in 1964 she moved to Nashville and started out as a songwriter. The following year she was signed as an artist and initially moulded as a pop singer, without success; after she was allowed to switch to country, she scored back-to-back hits and released her debut album Hello, I'm Dolly. In 1966 she married Carl Dean – their marriage endured until his death last year, with the couple renewing their vows in 2016.

Beginning in 1967, a duet partnership with the country singer Porter Wagoner helped her star continue to ascend, and she had her first country No 1 in 1971 with the song Joshua.

Jolene, her raw and desperate plea to a rival lover, was released in 1973 and became her first UK success, reaching No 7. I Will Always Love You, written to Wagoner as a farewell after their creative partnership, was a country No 1 in 1974 and would go on to be a huge pop success when revived by Whitney Houston for the soundtrack of The Bodyguard in 1992: it is still the bestselling single of all time by a woman, with an estimated 20m sales.

In the mid 1970s Parton broadened her sound, embracing pop-rock arrangements on songs such as 1977's Light of a Clear Blue Morning – its accompanying album New Harvest … First Gathering was her first entry in the pop album chart. Later that year its follow-up Here You Come Again reached the Top 20 and was her first million-selling LP, powered in part by its hit title track, which also won Parton the first of her 10 Grammy awards.

A peak in her success came in 1980, with three back-to-back country No 1s, including 9 to 5, taken from the film of the same name which Parton

◀ *Alongside her music career, Parton also won praise for her acting in films such as Rhinestone and Nine to Five, below*

PHOTOGRAPHS: SHUTTERSTOCK

▼ *Dolly Parton was a gifted country music singer-songwriter, actor, businesswoman and philanthropist*
PHOTOGRAPH: TRAE PATTON/NBCU/GETTY IMAGES

▲ *Parton often collaborated with other country stars, including Kenny Rogers and Porter Wagoner, left*
PHOTOGRAPH: DOUG PIZAC/AP

starred in alongside Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin, earning her an Oscar nomination for best original song.

Another classic single came in 1983: Islands in the Stream, a duet with Kenny Rogers, which topped the US pop charts, and a Christmas album with Rogers in 1984 went two times platinum. There were more notable film roles in the 1980s, too, opposite Burt Reynolds in The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas, Sylvester Stallone in Rhinestone, and an all-star female ensemble in Steel Magnolias.

▲ *Parton posing during a 1978 portrait session in Los Angeles*

The turn of the century brought a trilogy of acclaimed bluegrass albums, and Parton would release 10 more LPs, the most recent being Rockstar in 2023. She was courted by a younger generation of stars, appearing with country artists such as Brad Paisley as well as pop singers such as Kesha, and her goddaughter Miley Cyrus. There were fewer acting roles, but she lent her voice to animated film Gnomeo and Juliet in 2011 and the following year appeared alongside Queen Latifah and more in musical film Joyful Noise.

Parton was an astute businesswoman and philanthropist. She founded the film and TV production company Sandollar, with former manager Sandy Gallin, which went on to produce hits such as Buffy the Vampire Slayer and the Father of the Bride film series. In 1986, she took a stake in the Silver Dollar City theme park in Tennessee and renamed it Dollywood, doubling its size over the next two decades.

The Dollywood Foundation was created in 1988, initially awarding college scholarships and running a scheme to help children complete high school in her native Sevier County, Tennessee.

In 1995 Parton began her Imagination Library project, which sent an age-appropriate book to every child in the county every month until they were five. "My father could not read and write, and I saw how crippling that could be," she explained. It expanded nationwide in 2000, internationally in 2006, and nearly 25m books are now distributed each year across the US, Canada, Australia, the UK and Ireland.

In 2022, Jeff Bezos donated $100m (£83m) to the foundation. That year, Parton explained that as well as improving child literacy, "it's the fact they get recognised. They get this little book with their little name on it in the mail, and they feel special."

Parton supported Black Lives Matters and transgender rights, opposing a North Carolina "bathroom bill" that restricted transgender people's access to toilets. She made a number of donations to Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, Tennessee, where her niece was treated for leukaemia. The most high profile of these was in 2020, when she donated $1m for research into Covid-19, which formed the basis for the eventual Moderna vaccine.

'A force of evolution'

How Dolly diversified and shook off cliches

Alexis Petridis

In December 1977, Dolly Parton submitted to an interview with ABC Television's Barbara Walters, much against her friends' advice. Walters was not noted for her understanding of country music. She was a notoriously tough cookie who had battled scarcely believable sexism to become the first female co-host of an American news programme.

The month before, she had interviewed Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin while they were working out the terms of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty. It was all a very long way from Parton's world.

Walters looks aghast as Parton shows her around her tour bus, her collection of wigs and her "hand-washable and wrinkle-free" stage outfits ("You really like this? To me, it seems like horror"), and sits impassively as Parton sings Coat of Many Colours to her. She asks Parton if people from "where I come from" would call her a hillbilly; regards the singer's outfit with a jaundiced eye and tells her "you don't have to look like this". And, most infamously, she enquires: "Do you ever feel that you're a joke?"

"The joke's on the public," responds Parton, her smile never slipping. "I know exactly what I'm doing and I can change it any time … I'm sure of my talent."

It was a TV appearance that said a lot about perceptions of Parton in the years when she surged from Nashville fame to international superstardom. It also said a lot about Parton herself - notably that, beneath the rhinestones, she had more in common with Walters than anyone might have thought.

Of course she was sure of her talent: by the time she sat down with Walters, she had already written a string of imperishable country standards: Jolene, My Tennessee Mountain Home, Down from Dover, I Will Always Love You, Little Bird, Kentucky Gambler, Love Is Like a Butterfly, The Bargain Store, The Seeker.

> *'I know exactly what I'm doing and I can change it any time … I'm sure of my talent'*
>
> **Dolly Parton**
> *In a 1977 TV interview*

Of course she knew exactly what she was doing with her image, based - as she never tired of telling interviewers - on "the town tramp" back in Pittman Center, Tennessee. A woman whose first solo hit was called Dumb Blonde, she used it both to lure in a certain type of country fan ("rednecks with flat tops who bring women who wear short skirts or tight pants," as one 1970s journalist sniffily put it) and as a kind of glitzy, fluffy shield.

Behind it, she could be subtly subversive. Years before the controversy around Loretta Lynn's 1975 single The Pill highlighted Nashville's sexism, Parton was writing songs of a distinctly feminist bent - Just Because I'm a Woman and When Possession Gets Too Strong among them - even if she didn't describe herself as such.

Her daring became apparent around the time of the Walters interview, when Parton made a lunge for the pop mainstream, disregarding fears that it would alienate her existing audience.

She scored a succession of huge pop hits: 1977's Mann and Weill-penned Here You Come Again went to No 3 on the Hot 100, a chart on which Jolene had, incredibly, only peaked at No 60; three years later 9 to 5 hit No 1. She also acted and dabbled in disco without losing her country essence.

In a sense, her moment as a mainstream crossover pop star was relatively short-lived. But it didn't matter - the best of her 70s material had long taken on a life of its own outside country music. Whitney Houston's cover of I Will Always Love You became the biggest-selling single of all time by a female artist. At the last count, Jolene has been covered nearly 90 times.

Meanwhile, in the 21st century, the full extent of Parton's influence on pop became apparent. Taylor Swift called her "a force of evolution and transformation in our industry". Parton co-wrote Rainbowland on her goddaughter Miley Cyrus's 2017 album Younger Now, and you didn't have to analyse Sabrina Carpenter's work too deeply to spot the influence.

As fans of Tammy Wynette or Patsy Cline would be quick to point out, Parton wasn't the first female country star to cross over into the pop charts, but she nevertheless seemed like the godmother of the pop-country that has swept the charts in recent years.

When Beyoncé made a musical leap into country on Cowboy Carter, it somehow seemed inevitable that Parton would be involved, and so it proved: she delivered a spoken-word introduction to Beyoncé's version of Jolene. In fact, she seemed as present in pop music in the mid-2020s as she had been in the late 1970s. The difference was that no one would have asked her if she was a joke. That question had been answered to everyone's satisfaction a long time ago.

Burnham to be asked to support review into ditching first past the post elections

Continued *from page 1*

influential backbenchers such as Luke Akehurst and Chris Curtis, leading Labour centrists. Overall, MPs from eight parties, as well as independents, have signed.

Signatories also include MPs who have recently become ministers and ministerial aides, such as the energy secretary, Miatta Fahnbulleh, the communities minister, Florence Eshalomi, and the prime minister's parliamentary private secretary and close ally Jo Platt. However, the newly appointed frontbench MPs may by convention withdraw support for backbench amendments once parliament returns.

A new commission would not require legislation – meaning the amendment itself may end up out of the scope of the bill. But MPs intend to use the amendment as a way of signalling to the prime minister the breadth of support for swifter reform.

A national commission could consider a range of other proportional voting systems (PR) to replace the current FPTP general election system which means the winner of the most votes in each constituency is elected. Other systems are used across the UK, including for the Scottish parliament, the Welsh Senedd and mayoral votes.

In Scottish and Welsh elections, there are votes for a candidate and for a party, so additional members can be elected from a list alongside constituency representatives. In the recent Greater Manchester mayoral election, voters were given a first and second choice.

Sobel said it was time for Burnham to endorse the push – signed by more MPs than any other amendment in parliament. He said: "Now we know a majority of MPs back this proposal, including a majority of Labour MPs. I know the prime minister is committed to reforming our electoral system and I and all the MPs who signed this amendment want to work with him to set the UK on a road towards fair, modern general elections."

MPs told the Guardian Burnham should announce the commission before the budget in October. Rachel Blake, a former Treasury minister, said: "The PLP [parliamentary Labour party] agrees with Andy Burnham that first past the post is broken – and that a national commission is the way to get a grip on it. The government should press ahead and launch this process within the prime minister's first 100 days."

Akehurst, a member of Labour's governing national executive committee, said: "Parliament is catching up with the public, most of whom already support electoral reform. Andy Burnham has a good track record on proportional representation, and it's now hugely popular across the Labour party. He should seize this opportunity."

The Labour MP Lizzi Collinge said FPTP "particularly devalues the votes of renters, young people and BAME people, and delivers parliaments that do not represent what most people voted for."

Another former minister, Catherine Fookes, said FPTP "can't cope with modern, multi-party politics. Andy Burnham has long talked about the need to move to a fair, proportional system. If he acts now by setting up a commission, he will find that most MPs support him from across parliament – and make good on his promise to rewire British politics."

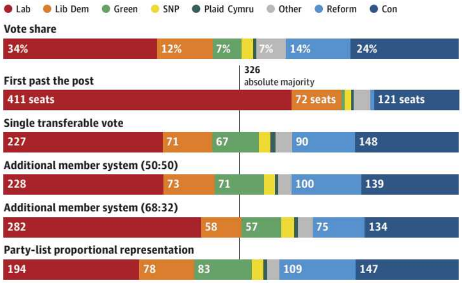
Mike Reader, another Labour MP, said the poll of MPs showed there had been "a sea change in support for PR across Labour and the public. Most MPs know it is the fair thing for the country, it's just a matter of how we get there. We hope Andy Burnham will now stick to his guns."

Labour members at the party's annual conference in 2022 previously backed a move towards PR, which Burnham called a "historic vote" and said it would be a move towards "a country that works for everybody, where everyone's vote counts".

Campaign groups said they hoped Burnham would seize the moment for reform while he had a workable parliamentary majority. The Make Votes Matter chief executive, Emma Harrison, said: "I've spoken alongside Andy in favour of proportional representation, I know he supports it – now he must show the public he deserves our trust."

The UK last rejected electoral reform in 2011 after a referendum was held to ask whether to change to an alternative vote system where voters would rank candidates in order of preference.

2024 general election results under different electoral systems



Guardian graphic. Source: Electoral Reform Society. Note: other includes seats in Northern Ireland, independents and the speaker. Vote share for Labour includes votes cast in the speaker's constituency

Electoral reform
Who wants it and will it happen?

Andy Burnham is facing new pressure to act over electoral reform, with nearly 100 of his MPs backing a commission to decide on a route to replace the first past the post (FPTP) voting system. Why is this an issue for Labour – and will anything happen?

What is the official view of the government?

Officially, no change. The 2024 Labour manifesto only discussed elections in terms of changes to ID rules and allowing 16- and 17-year-olds the vote. Burnham has previously said he would not deviate from the manifesto.

Unofficially, things are very different. Burnham is a longstanding supporter of electoral reform. In 2022, the Labour conference voted overwhelmingly to support a proportional electoral system. A similar motion was only defeated the previous year after unions blocked it.

Why is there renewed pressure?

Two main reasons. The first is that the makeup of Labour MPs changed notably with the 2024 election. Many longer-standing MPs had been sceptical about electoral reform, arguing that proportional representation would create unstable coalitions. In contrast, many new MPs, like the bulk of Labour members, support change.

Also, politics is different. FPTP had something of a rationale when Labour and the Conservatives won the bulk of votes. But eroded party loyalties have created an atomised system in which five parties – Reform UK, Labour, the Conservatives, Liberal Democrats and Greens – are bunched in a tight group. Even in the 2024 election, Labour won nearly two-thirds of all Commons seats with just a third of votes.

What are the MPs hoping to solve with electoral change?

There is a very direct vested interest for some Labour MPs: Reform has polled regularly at around or above 30%, and if replicated in a general election it could send Nigel Farage into No 10 with a huge majority, but on limited public support.

There is, however, more to it. Supporters of a proportional system note that FPTP means millions end up having to vote tactically, picking a candidate who may realistically win, rather than the person or party they truly support, which can create disenchantment and cynicism.

They also point out that, while supporters of FPTP argue it brings stability, a country with its seventh prime minister in just over a decade is hardly a beacon for this virtue.

How would results differ under a proportional system?

There are many different potential systems, all of which would bring varying results. But as a guide, if the 2024 election had been held under a completely proportional method, rather than a Labour landslide Keir Starmer would have needed the support of other parties to have got anything done.

There is also another factor – as electoral systems change, so does voting behaviour. One of the main blocks to support for smaller parties has been the belief among voters that they cannot win and are thus a wasted vote. Under a proportional method, this could change.

So is anything going to happen?

In the short term, no. Even with the prospect of a Reform government, Burnham has categorically ruled out any change to the electoral system before the next election.

What the Labour MPs hope to achieve is a plan that could form part of the next manifesto – a commitment that if the party was re-elected, it would change the voting system. If this involved a proportional system, it would most likely get the support of the Lib Dems, Greens, Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru.

Reform also officially supports electoral reform, with Nigel Farage a long-term advocate – even though he has gone quiet on the issue since his party began leading in the polls.

Peter Walker

New York
Officials prepare for possibility of PM meeting Trump

Peter Walker and Jessica Elgot

UK officials are making preparations for a potential meeting between Andy Burnham and Donald Trump after the prime minister said he hoped to attend next month's UN general assembly in New York.

Burnham is known to be particularly keen to attend the annual gathering after meeting Volodymyr

▲ *The PM meeting Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kyiv, when he pledged to give more help to Ukraine*
PHOTOGRAPH: REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

Zelenskyy in Kyiv on Monday, when he pledged to help drum up more international support for Ukraine.

Any meeting with the US president, whether in New York or Washington, is notably more speculative. But British officials who had already begun planning for a first encounter are understood to be stepping up their work given Burnham's expected visit.

As part of a series of interviews in Kyiv during his first overseas trip as prime minister, Burnham told Bloomberg: "I'm looking forward to going to New York in September."

Speaking after a meeting with Zelenskyy, he said: "I've not fully confirmed the details yet, but it's likely I will go, particularly after today's discussion. Leaving today, I'm quite clear what I need to do in the next few weeks."

Chairing a meeting in Kyiv of the "coalition of the willing" group of countries that are supporting Ukraine, Burnham urged the international community to do more to protect the country against Russian attacks, particularly with more US-made Patriot interceptor missiles.

He told LBC in another interview: "We need to go further together … There is an urgent need for air defence support."

The general assembly would be just one part of international efforts to generate more support for Ukraine, particularly in the form of missiles. The defence secretary, Wes Streeting, will co-chair a meeting of the Ukraine defence contact group in September.

The group, which includes all 32 Nato members and 25 other countries, coordinates the supply of military assistance.

Attending the UN gathering, which will host almost 200 world leaders from 22 to 28 September, would give Burnham an opportunity to press the case about more support for Ukraine, as would a meeting with Trump.

Burnham and the foreign secretary, Ed Miliband, would discuss a series of other global issues at the assembly, including Gaza and the humanitarian crisis in Sudan. The meeting will coincide with the first anniversary of Keir Starmer's decision to recognise a Palestinian state.

It would give Burnham the opportunity to meet a number of other world leaders in one go, though bilateral talks tend to be brief given the frenetic schedule of the gathering.

The prime minister's policy background is predominantly domestic, and since entering No 10 he has had to rapidly develop a foreign policy – thus far very similar to that of Starmer – and get to know world leaders.

He joined a number of other European leaders, including the European council president, António Costa, in laying wreaths for Ukraine's Independence Day in Kyiv on Monday.

He also announced that the UK government would allow the European defence company MBDA to declassify information about British-made components of the Anglo-French Storm Shadow/Scalp missiles to help Ukraine build its own version.

Burnham told Zelenskyy during their meeting that there would be "no change in the UK's steadfast support" for Kyiv. He also urged Ukraine's allies to send more Patriot missiles as Ukraine struggles under continued Russian bombardment.

▲ *Burnham is keen to meet Trump following the PM's visit to Ukraine*

Burnham also co-chaired his first coalition of the willing meeting, where he said the group was doing everything it could to "dig into our own stocks and help others dig into their stocks".

Zelenskyy has pleaded for more US-made interceptor missiles in recent months as Kyiv's stocks have fallen. Supplies of Patriots have been diverted to the Middle East since the the US and Israel launched their war against Iran, and Ukraine has received significantly fewer this year than in previous years.

During his interview with Bloomberg, Burnham said he felt "really confident" the weaponry problem was fixable. "There are other players who could help in the mix who we have influence with," he said. "It's probably going to be a solution that involves a lot of layers and a lot of negotiation."

Russia has sought to capitalise on the shortage by increasing its missile strikes, killing at least 23 and wounding over 100 in the past three days.

Moscow has also threatened unspecified retaliation for what it says is the UK's increased involvement in the conflict.

Rishi Sunak

Badenoch plotted to oust him in 2023, book claims

Peter Walker
Senior political correspondent

Kemi Badenoch plotted with fellow Conservatives to remove Rishi Sunak as prime minister a year before the general election, it has been claimed.

Anthony Seldon, who has written political biographies of every prime minister since John Major, has alleged in a new book that Badenoch, who was business secretary at the time, phoned several other cabinet ministers to ask "if anyone was interested in changing the captain".

An ally of Badenoch, who is now the Tory leader, described the claim as "total bollocks".

The book about Sunak's time as PM, which is being serialised in the Independent, says Badenoch did not respect Sunak, who she believed had been rude to her. Citing a series of sources, it says she sought to oust him in 2023, when he faced internal pressure over migration policy.

It quotes one MP, who the book says is currently a member of Badenoch's frontbench team, as saying she was "a menace who orchestrated trouble in the cabinet" under Sunak.

Sunak at 10: The Last Conservative Prime Minister? cites another "insider" as saying Badenoch "was actively looking at bringing Sunak down, constructing imaginary cabinets and offering jobs".

After Robert Jenrick resigned as immigration minister in 2023 over details of Sunak's plan to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda, the book says Badenoch discussed telling Sunak she would resign from the cabinet if he did not amend the policy.

It was at this point, the book says, that Badenoch contacted other ministers to see if any wanted a change in PM. It says she wanted "to avoid the image of wielding the knife".

Danny Kruger, then a Tory MP who, like Jenrick, has since defected to Reform UK, told Seldon Badenoch "definitely wanted" to remove Sunak and replace him "but was concerned about being a fag-end prime minister" given the looming election.

Seldon says Badenoch decided against any challenge as she thought this would lead to her being blamed for an election defeat, as well as her worry that she might lose a leadership contest to Penny Mordaunt.

The plotting prompted Sunak to condemn what he called "attention-seeking" rebels, the book says, adding that the PM told allies: "They probably want me to tell them to fuck off so they can pontificate, but … I'm not going to rise to the bait."

Sunak said the impression of plotting and infighting pushed down the Tory vote. Badenoch later became Tory leader, defeating Jenrick in a vote of Conservative members.

Sunak's office was contacted for comment.

London bus drivers resume strike over heatwave working

Joanna Partridge

London bus drivers have resumed strike action over having to work in high temperatures, amid fears that proposed improvements to air conditioning will not be complete by next summer.

About 1,500 members of the Unite union working across north London and Essex are taking part in the strike, which started yesterday and runs to Friday, after industrial action earlier this month. Further stoppages are planned for the coming weeks.

The Unite union and bus operator Arriva North London reached an agreement during talks last week, but some drivers rejected the company's offer, with workers deciding it did not go far enough to solve the problem of working in hot weather.

The Guardian understands many are concerned that proposals to improve the air-conditioning system across Arriva North London's fleet may not be finished by next summer.

Bus drivers have reported "excessive in-cab heat" for years, saying poor or faulty cooling was allowing temperatures to rise above 30C.

Temperatures have often exceeded 40C during this year's record run of five heatwaves and there are concerns that such conditions could return in 2027.

Bus drivers have reported the air-cooling system in their cabs has only managed to reduce temperatures by about 2-3C, putting them at extra risk of fatigue and also causing some to suffer health problems including heat exhaustion, heatstroke and dehydration.

The Unite general secretary, Sharon Graham, said: "London bus drivers do a vital job, but are putting themselves at risk due to these appalling conditions. Arriva can fully afford to make meaningful changes our members can accept. Until that happens, strike action will continue and our members at Arriva North London will continue to have the full backing of Unite."

1,500

The number of Unite union members taking part in the strike, which will last until Friday

Drivers at eight bus garages - at Barking, Edmonton, Enfield, Grays, Palmers Green, Stamford Hill, Tottenham, and Wood Green - went on strike on 14 and 18 August, which Unite said had led to delays and cancellations for more than 40 routes.

Drivers at three of these garages voted against the new offer put forward by Arriva. The union members have resumed their strike.

A spokesperson for Arriva London said: "We are disappointed that this strike is going ahead when five out of eight of our north London garages have said they don't want [a strike]. We have already reached agreement with Unite officials on every demand - and we continue to seek feedback from Unite to understand what concerns remain at the three garages that voted to strike."

They added: "The safety and wellbeing of our colleagues and customers will always be our highest priority and measures have been introduced this summer to help drivers cope with extreme heat, while we are also investing in air conditioning upgrades for driver cabs across our London fleet."

Arriva, along with Unite, are members of Transport for London's extreme weather taskforce, which has been established to find a solution to weather challenges.

Further bus driver strikes are planned for eight occasions during September and October.

ARRIVA London North
STAMFORD HILL GARA
ARRIVA
NO AIR CON NO BUSES
TOO HOT TO WORK ACT NOW!
ARRIVA LONDON NORTH
DON'T STEW THE CREW!

▲ *Bus drivers are concerned that proposed improvements to air conditioning on Arriva buses will not be implemented in time for next summer, when more heatwaves are expected to drive up temperatures* PHOTOGRAPH: GUY SMALLMAN/GETTY

Extreme heat shows urgency of promoting cycling and walking over cars, campaigners say

Damien Gayle
Environment correspondent

Dozens of civil society groups have demanded the government do more to promote cycling and walking, after extreme heat exposed the desperate need to decarbonise transport.

This summer's heatwaves and wildfires were "immediate, real-world manifestations of the climate emergency", the campaigners said, making reform of transport - behind more carbon emissions than any other UK sector - an urgent priority.

Last year, domestic transport was responsible for almost a third of the UK's net greenhouse gas emissions.

The demand comes after Labour appeared to have shelved targets for an increase in trips made by public transport, and a reduction in trips made by private vehicles.

Campaigners want more trips to be made by bike

Before the 2024 election, Labour had committed to setting targets for a "modal shift" in transport. That meant a shift in travel habits away from private vehicles and towards public transport and active travel, such as cycling and walking.

But by this summer, the government's cycling and walking strategy had no broader targets to increase the percentage of total trips made by public transport or to reduce the percentage of total trips made by cars.

The intervention, signed by 54 civil society organisations, was led by the Campaign for Better Transport. Chief executive Ben Plowden said their call had been lent increased urgency by the summer's repeated heatwaves and the oil price inflation caused by the US war on Iran.

"That such a range of organisations have come together to make this statement shows the urgent need for stronger action in response to the climate emergency, which has had such a devastating impact on communities across the country this summer," he added.

"The heatwaves and wildfires, the harm to people, nature and infrastructure, are just a taste of things to come if we do not act urgently."

The statement called on the government to develop policies including "increasing the proportion of journeys made by public transport, shared transport, walking, wheeling and cycling", and targets to increase freight carried by trains.

"With the majority of journeys under five miles, this will benefit local communities, making it easier for people to get to shops, schools, health services and see friends and family," it said.

Plowden said: "It's really a question around getting on with the sort of investment primarily in local transport improvements that would allow all of those things to happen simultaneously and as part of the same process.

"And we think that that needs to be driven by central government setting an overall target for enabling people to change how they travel, away from private vehicle use and to be able to choose public transport, walks, cycle, wheeled and shared mobility. And of course obviously increase the uptake of electric vehicles as well."

Entrepreneur 'feared for life' during alleged watch robbery in Mayfair

Press Association

A fashion designer has told a court he feared for his life when his diamond-encrusted watch was allegedly cut from his wrist in central London.

The Romanian entrepreneur Cătălin Botezatu had been having dinner with his assistant and a friend in Mayfair before he was allegedly robbed of his Richard Mille watch - worth more than £137,000 - by three men, Southwark crown court heard.

Jurors heard Botezatu had been smoking a cigar outside with his friend on the terrace of the Latin American restaurant Amazónico in Berkeley Square on the evening of 28 January, and it was then that his watch was spotted by a man.

Ali Eldahouzze, 22, and Abdel El Habchi, 30, are accused of robbing Botezatu of the watch, which prosecutors say was cut from his wrist in an attack just before midnight.

The prosecutor Arizuna Asante told the court yesterday that after leaving the restaurant, Botezatu "stood near the car smoking for a few minutes with his friend before he was approached by three males".

Giving evidence from behind a screen, Botezatu, from Bucharest, told the court he had been standing near a fence, metres from the restaurant, when three men came up to him. "I was pushed into the fence and restrained," Botezatu told jurors, speaking through an interpreter.

Asked who pushed him, the complainant said: "All of them, the three of them pushed me. The man in the middle had a sharp instrument, I don't know what, and he cut me. He cut the watch strap as well."

He told the court: "I couldn't believe that something like this could happen in London, in front of a luxury restaurant where I was a client.

"I feared for my life. Because of my cancer operation and because I have five stents and because the slightest blow or cut, God forbid, where I was operated, could have been fatal."

The court heard Botezatu was given the watch about 13 years ago. "It had a lot of sentimental value, it came from a very good friend of mine who is unfortunately no longer with us," he said.

Prosecutors say the two defendants robbed Botezatu alongside a third man, Younes Djoudi, who has pleaded guilty to robbery. Eldahouzze and El Habchi each deny one count of robbery. The trial continues.

◀ *Cătălin Botezatu said the diamond-encrusted watch was a present from a late friend*

Britons to be told to stock up on food and be prepared for emergencies

Jessica Elgot and Kiran Stacey

British people will be told to stock up on tinned food and take steps to ensure they are prepared for national emergencies as part of a new government campaign to improve the nation's resilience.

The new campaign from the Cabinet Office will set out ways people can prepare for extreme weather events and potential attacks from hostile states, including stocking up on bottled water, sources told the Guardian. The aim will be to ensure households have basic supplies and knowledge about how to cope, so immediate government resources can be reserved for the most vulnerable.

Planning for a number of disasters, from cyber-attacks to extreme heat and flooding, has been stepped up in recent months after a number of incidents in the UK and globally. The plans, first reported by the FT, also include internal reassessment of government preparations for a military attack by a hostile state.

The Cabinet Office minister, Louise Haigh, who is Andy Burnham's de facto deputy, is also understood to be coordinating crisis planning across departments in Whitehall to allow swifter assistance to affected communities.

During his campaign to be Makerfield's MP, Burnham spoke about the threat of flooding and the inadequacy of government planning and response. He convened a Cobra meeting earlier this month to coordinate the government's response to the heatwave amid a threat of spreading wildfires and drought warnings.

The government was criticised, however, for its decision to send an emergency phone alert warning of wildfires last week, which charities and domestic abuse survivors said risked the safety of victims who might be hiding secret phones.

Haigh's predecessor, Darren Jones, had said work was being done on the so-called "war book" for how international conflict may affect the UK.

The Cabinet Office said: "Safeguarding national security is the first priority of any government. We're committed to raising awareness of simple steps households can take to make themselves more resilient, as well as driving forward the Home Defence Programme to build our country's preparedness for various threats."

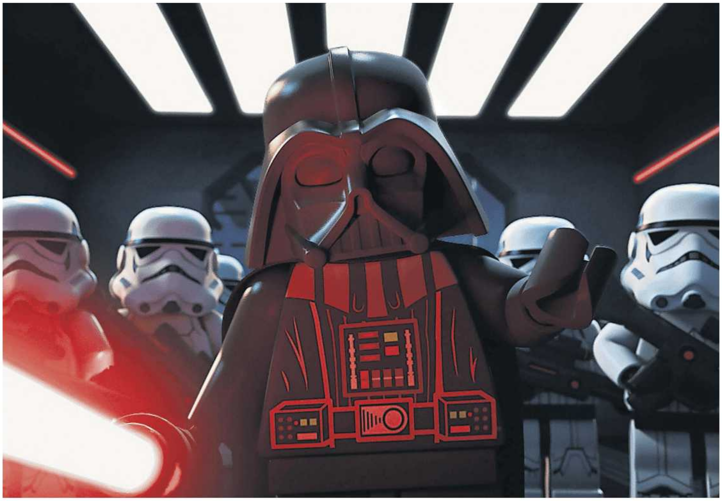
Burnham's predecessor, Keir Starmer, warned before he left office that Russia could attack a Nato country within four years, according to western intelligence assessments.

Visiting Ukraine on Monday, Burnham accused the Kremlin of "outrageous threats" against the UK. Russia had warned of an escalation in tensions after the government's decision to present Ukraine with newly declassified blueprints to allow Kyiv to improve its production of long-range missiles.

Vladimir Putin's spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, said the move would add "fuel to the fire" and obstruct any moves towards peace. "Britain is involved in this war on the side of the Kyiv regime," Peskov told reporters.

Last week, hackers linked to Iran were blamed for a cyber-attack that caused a British power plant to be temporarily shut down. The incident involved a small-scale energy generator, according to the government, which said that at no point was there a risk to the wider energy system, but it marks an apparent escalation in the threat posed by Iran.

▼ *Flooding in Monmouth in 2024. People will be urged to prepare for extreme weather and cyber-attacks* PHOTOGRAPH: MATTHEW HORWOOD/GETTY



▲ *Lego Star Wars on Disney; left, a World Cup 2026 Lego pop-up in Bangkok, Thailand* PHOTOGRAPHS: DISNEY XD/GETTY; PATRICK CHENGZHI WANG/ALAMY

Lego sales up 20% on tie-ins to Star Wars and World Cup

Sarah Butler

Lego sales have risen by more than a fifth as tie-ups with the football World Cup and the hit film KPop Demon Hunters as well as its flower-based and Star Wars kits drive demand.

The Danish toymaker said its revenues had increased by 21% to 41.9bn Danish kroner (£4.8bn) in the first six months of 2026, driven by strong growth in the Americas, Europe and the Asia Pacific regions, offsetting stalled sales in China.

Sales by its clients to consumers rose by 22% as it produced World Cup kits, including miniature figures of players such as Harry Kane, and even building kits for key players including Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi which were retailing for up to £159.99.

Net profit increased 32% to 8.6bn Danish kroner (£1bn) as the group launched 330 new products including its hi-tech Smart Play kit, with bricks that emit sounds and light.

Niels B Christiansen, the chief executive of Lego Group, said: "We are very pleased with our strong start to 2026 and the excitement we see for the Lego brand.

"Our portfolio of products offers something for everyone, and culturally relevant brand experiences continue to drive demand across the globe. Our success in the market means that we can maintain high investment levels in growth and sustainability for both the short and long term."

He said the World Cup was "a breakthrough for us" in providing "exciting sets" linked to football and "an example of us bringing the Lego brand close to a passion point and interest for many people".

Christiansen said Lego was expanding solar energy capacity at all of its factories. In June, it began constructing its largest solar installation so far in Billund, Denmark – its main headquarters and the home of the original Legoland park. The site, which will begin operating next year, will feature 160,000 panels able to produce 99GWh a year. It is designed to match the company's electricity needs in the town.

£1bn

Net profit for Lego Group in the first six months of 2026, as the group launched 330 new products

Lego also said it would continue its global shift towards using paper bags in its packaging and expected that to be completed next year.

Increased use of recycled plastic in the bricks is helping to offset the rising costs of virgin plastic driven by the impact of the crisis in the Middle East which has pushed up the price of crude oil.

The company said it did expect to see costs rise in the second half of the year as it paid more for fuelling its lorries and for raw materials. But it said there would not be a "material impact" on the business.

Lego has led a resurgence in the toy market in the past year, as adults look for an alternative entertainment to phones and TV screens.

Christiansen said sales to both children and adults were increasing and there was a "nice synergy" between the two groups as if "more adults get excited about the brand they become super ambassadors" in buying the kits for children and young people.

"Kidults" (buyers aged 12 and over) are spending their spare cash on expensive Lego sets and collectible figurines. This group is behind £1 in every £3 spent on toys in the UK, and these buyers spent 10% more in 2025 than the year before, according to a study by the market research company Circana.

With toys linked to a wide range of interests, from sports such as Formula One to hit films and TV shows including KPop Demon Hunters and Stranger Things, the British Toy and Hobby Association has said there appears to be an "evolving era of play, where toys are increasingly embedded in wider cultural moments, enjoyed by all the family".

Emissions from two datacentres 'higher than Exxon's'

Pippa Neill
Environment reporter

The carbon emissions from just two planned datacentres in England will exceed all of the fossil fuel company ExxonMobil's UK emissions, analysis has revealed.

Experts have said this shows the "serious threat" datacentres pose to the UK's legally binding climate goals.

Analysis by the non-profit group Foxglove reveals that when they are fully operational, the Wapsey's Wood datacentre in Buckinghamshire and the Quest Park datacentre in Bedfordshire will use 1.3GW of power and will produce more than 4.5m tonnes of carbon emissions. ExxonMobil emitted 3.9m tonnes in 2023, according to the global energy thinktank Ember.

AI datacentres use a huge amount of electricity to power servers and cooling equipment, and to run facility systems. There are currently 315 datacentres in the queue to connect to the UK's electricity grid, representing 73GW of demand. This is almost double the peak winter energy demand for the entire UK.

Because of the long wait to connect to the grid, the Wapsey's Wood and Quest Park datacentres are seeking to build their own gas-fired power stations. Based on government figures on the carbon intensity of electricity generation, Foxglove has calculated these projects will produce 4.577m tonnes of carbon emissions each year.

▲ *Initial construction work under way for the Wapsey's Wood datacentre in Buckinghamshire*
PHOTOGRAPH: SDCM40CAMPUS.CO.UK

A government spokesperson said these figures were "misleading" because of the assumption that both projects will run at 100% utilisation from day one, which they said was "not accurate".

However, Tom Hegarty, the head of communications at Foxglove, said assuming a 100% utilisation rate followed standard industry practice. Kierra Box, a trade and environmental regulation campaigner at Friends of the Earth, said the aim was for datacentres to increase load and run at full capacity, and so it was "valid to look at those top-level predictions".

The former England and Wales Green party leader Caroline Lucas described the projected emissions from these projects as "absolutely horrifying", and said it should be ringing alarm bells across government.

The government says its own analysis shows there are multiple pathways for this rapid datacentre rollout to fit within the seventh carbon budget, which sets out how the government will reach its climate targets. However, there remains uncertainty over how this will work.

Toby Perkins, a Labour MP and chair of the Commons environmental audit committee, which is leading an inquiry into the environmental impact of datacentres, said this analysis was a "potent reminder that without the right measures in place, datacentres could represent a serious threat to the environment and to our legally binding climate goals".

Oliver Hayes, the head of policy at Global Action Plan, said the two projects were "catastrophic for our carbon budgets". He said the only way the rapid rollout of datacentres could fit was if other parts of the economy had far stricter carbon budgets.

4.58m
Tonnes of annual carbon emissions projected to be produced by Wapsey's Wood and Quest Park

The datacentres are two of the first to be fast-tracked through the government's nationally significant infrastructure project (NSIP) regime, which allows developers to rapidly develop infrastructure projects by bypassing local planning authorities to gain central government approval.

Hayes said it was a "very worrying sign" that the government had allowed two gas-fired datacentres into the NSIP regime.

The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero said datacentres were vital to the economy, "driving growth and renewal for communities". It added: "We will enable the development and growth of new industries, such as datacentres, by building unprecedented amounts of clean power."

Wapsey's Wood declined to comment. Quest Park did not respond to a request for comment.

Trailer for new Ali G film reveals pranks, victims - and dreadlocks

Laurence Phelan

The first full trailer for Ali G: Who Iz I? has been released, revealing some of the escapades and pranks - and their victims - that will appear in the second feature-length comedy starring the west Staines rudeboy character created by Sacha Baron Cohen.

Sporting new dreadlocks but still wearing the clothing favoured by young white Britons copying US hip-hop and Black streetwear fashions in the 00s, Ali G is back to contend with the issues of the day - as well as the pregnancy of his long-term girlfriend, Julie. In the 20 years the character has been away, he says, "the world went to crap: there was Covid, wars and Ed Sheeran".

The trailer gives glimpses of pranks played on the retired US army general Stewart Rodeheaver, and someone who may be the Canadian DJ and producer Deadmau5 at a music festival.

Ali G first appeared on The 11 O'Clock Show in 1998, then in three series of Da Ali G Show in the early 00s. The 2002 feature-length Ali G: Indahouse received a mixed critical reception but earned more than £17m at the UK box office.

Ali G: Who Iz I? is scheduled for release in cinemas on 23 October.

▲ *Sacha Baron Cohen's character is back, complete with a new look*

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Five more arrested over crash that killed seven amid warning of social media trend

Raphael Boyd

Five more people have been arrested by detectives investigating a crash that killed seven people including two police officers.

PC Matthew Blades, 37, and PC Tom Clough, 38, were killed on Saturday when a Volkswagen Passat, which had been pursued by police, was driven the wrong way down the A66 near Middlesbrough and hit their marked armed response vehicle. All five occupants of the pursued car - Cole Robert Worthy, 17; Theo Rae, 17; Makai Saddington, 18; Michael Robert Cahill, 23; and Jacob Matusiak, 23 - were declared dead at the scene.

Police have said the group had links to "serious and organised criminal activity" and that four of the five had a total of 37 previous convictions for offences such as possession of a bladed article, car theft, possession of drugs, racially aggravated intentional harassment and numerous driving offences.

The crash has led to greater scrutiny of an emerging trend in which young people post videos online of cars they are in being driven dangerously. One senior figure in the Police Federation of England and Wales said young people were "baiting police officers" with reckless driving.

Paul Williams, the federation's acting deputy national chair, told BBC Breakfast that reckless driving among young people had become a "real problem" for officers. "Every day we can identify now numerous examples of young people sensationalising dangerous driving," said Williams. "Not just dangerous driving, but baiting police officers who are out there to protect the public."

He added: "It's a real problem. It's causing officers concern. They shouldn't have to be going out and worrying about whether they're going to return home from their shift or not. But on top of that, wondering if they're going to be plastered all over social media. It's absolutely unacceptable and social media platforms need to take some action."

The five arrests yesterday came a day after Cleveland police announced that 12 people, nine men and three women, had been arrested. Officers said they received several reports of two vehicles, the VW Passat and a Volvo XC60, being drivien dangerously at the time.

Of those 12, four were arrested on suspicion of participating in an organised crime group and four on suspicion of possessing a firearm, while four of the suspects were also accused of possessing class A and B drugs with intent to supply.

Two of the 12 people previously arrested have now appeared in court. Kai Beattie, 19, appeared at Teesside magistrates court charged with possession of a firearm with intent to endanger life. Cameron George, 26, was remanded in custody to appear at Teesside crown court on 21 September charged with drugs offences and possession of criminal property.

The five arrested yesterday were a boy aged 16 and two men, 18 and 21, all on suspicion of participating in an organised crime group; a 55-year-old on suspicion of assisting an offender; and a 23-year-old on suspicion of making threats to kill.

Road safety statistics up to 2025 also show that a trend in dangerous driving for young people, particularly young men, is on the rise, with 77 people aged between 16 and 20 dying last year, compared with 65 the year before and 55 in 2016, the largest rise of any age group.

The government has acknowledged the need to challenge social media companies that platform videos which encourage dangerous trends, with a Downing Street spokesperson saying on Monday that No 10 would give the regulator Ofcom its full backing to "take tough action" on any sites and apps that do not moderate or remove such content.

The crash in Middlesbrough is one of several incidents involving people trying to evade police in the past fortnight across the UK, with a similar accident taking place in England yesterday, when a crash after a police pursuit in Warwickshire led to a man dying and a woman being admitted to hospital.

In Ireland last week, another similar incident resulted in four people, including a seven-year-old boy, being sent to hospital when a car containing five teenagers drove into them on the M9 in County Kildare to evade Garda. All five teenagers were killed.

◀ *Floral tributes to the officers who were killed, PC Tom Clough and PC Matthew Blades, at the Cleveland police headquarters in Middlesbrough. Above and right, flowers and messages beside the A66, near the site of the fatal head-on collision*

PHOTOGRAPHS: OWEN HUMPHREYS/PA; IAN FORSYTH/GETTY

Man dies and woman badly hurt after Warwickshire police chase

Neha Gohil
Midlands correspondent

A man died and a woman was critically injured on Monday evening after a police pursuit in Warwickshire.

Police said officers had tried to stop a black Audi on Birmingham Road in Stratford-upon-Avon at 5.23pm, but the vehicle failed to stop and drove towards the A46.

Officers then followed the car as it travelled back towards the town on the A439 Warwick Road before the vehicle collided with a white Ford Puma at 5.44pm. A number of other vehicles were also damaged during the pursuit.

The man driving the Audi was pronounced dead at the scene by paramedics and the female driver of the Ford was taken to hospital where she remained in a critical condition.

Another woman, who was a passenger in the second car, suffered potentially serious injuries that were not believed to be life-threatening, West Midlands ambulance service (WMAS) said.

The families of the victims were informed and were offered specialist support, police said.

Supt Steve Flavell said: "Our thoughts are with the families of everyone involved in this collision and we're providing specialist support to them at this extremely difficult time.

"We made a mandatory referral to the Independent Office for Police Conduct because a death had occurred following police contact. They have declared an independent investigation and we will cooperate fully with their investigation."

A spokesman for the IOPC said the watchdog's investigation was at an early stage.

They said: "We were notified by the force at 7.40pm and IOPC investigators attended the police post-incident procedure to begin gathering information. We declared an independent investigation at 9.38pm.

"We understand that the driver of a black Audi A3 failed to stop for police and was then pursued for around six minutes before the vehicle was involved in a collision with a car being driven by a member of the public."

▲ *The crash happened on the A439 Warwick Road on Monday evening*

FIVE MARVEL AT
MYTHICAL MUMBLES

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ADVENTURES START HERE

A new approach Scientists turn to birth control to manage cities' rats

Isaaq Tomkins

'Rodents have paid for every bill I've ever had - every mortgage, every car payment, every pint of Guinness," says Dr Robert Corrigan. "It's been a great ride and I'm still at it."

New York-based Corrigan is one of the most respected voices in the world of rodentology. Now in his 70s, he has devoted his entire adult life to studying rats and our relationship with them.

Last year, he and 10 other scientists published a paper describing the effect of global heating on rat populations. In 16 cities they found that rat numbers had increased dramatically, and there was a correlation between their numbers and rising temperatures.

The two most common types of rat - the black and the brown - do not hibernate, which means in places with regular winters their reproduction slows down or even stops during cold periods. Here lies the problem, says Corrigan.

"When you have repeating warm winters, one after the other, the rats benefit," he says. For many families of rats, the warmer temperatures may only offer a marginal advantage, but the problem escalates "when you start multiplying that little bit of extra rat production by hundreds of millions of rats".

Humans have been trying to control rats for centuries. Often an invasive species, they are vectors for disease, decimate crop yields and destabilise ecosystems as they hunt other species to extinction. Yet domesticated rats are often kept as affectionate pets.

Now, more scientists and public servants around the world are trying to manage rats without filling cities with poison. Methods for doing so range from contraceptives to robust public health regulations.

The biggest issue with our current approach to rats - dumping poison on them - is that we treat them like "any old vermin", says Corrigan. They are "smart mammals with mammal brains".

▲ *Rats have been reviled as disease carriers, but are also kept as pets*

▲ *Scientists are trying to manage rats using methods such as contraceptives, which will not fill cities with poison* PHOTOGRAPH: FATIH AKTAS/ANADOLU AGENCY/GETTY

He should know. Corrigan first got to know rats while working as an exterminator in the sewers of New York City. He worked in the sewers to save up for graduate school, where he studied rodent pest management. He then spent weekends camping out in barns to observe rats.

"I saw things," says Corrigan. "I saw kindness: that rat just brought food to another because it looked sick. I saw aggression: a bully would come around and attack other rats for no reason."

He describes his feelings towards rats as paradoxical: "Do I love that species and do I respect it as a scientist? Heck, yes. On the other hand, I know that they cannot cohabitate with us because they can kill us."

Rats can carry pathogens that spill over into human populations. These include Weil's disease, hantavirus and new variants of coronavirus. And yet, of all the methods used to control rat populations, poison is not one Corrigan would recommend. "It's a band aid," he says.

There are compelling reasons to not throw everything at rodenticides, even though most experts - including Corrigan - do acknowledge their usefulness as a temporary corrective measure.

As with many public health problems, prevention is better than cure. Enforcing stricter public health regulations is often more effective than letting rat populations spiral and then poisoning them to regain control.

Aside from the cruel, slow death they result in for rats, rodenticides are known to harm other wildlife and can end up being consumed by humans - in the US there are already thousands of accidental human rodenticide poisonings each year.

One hope for better managing rat populations is fertility controls, which are increasingly popular in the US after public concern about wildlife poisoning from rodenticides. Europe is catching up as more experts champion the technology, which uses contraceptives to slow down rat population growth.

"Developing new forms of birth control is the key to managing the soaring number of poison-resistant rats compassionately," says Richard Parr, the director of UK charity Center for Wild Animal Welfare. He says outdated biocidal regulation in the EU is "stifling innovation". While the EU's regulation is under review, it is not yet equipped to deal with new fertility control technology, creating uncertainty that deters investment.

But Steven Belmain of the University of Greenwich is sceptical about fertility controls. "People are sometimes quite naive thinking we can use fertility control. If you've got a rat in your house, you're not going to feed it contraceptives and just let it live there with you," he says.

"Our restaurants, our hotels, our hospitals, our food warehouses will all just collapse without having any sort of poison management."

Hundreds of people around the world are trying to figure out a way to address increasing rat populations, and few are in doubt about the impact the climate crisis is having. Corrigan puts it simply: "Planet Earth is changing and the rats are benefiting."

‘He’s box office’: Gary Lineker says he would poach rival Roy Keane

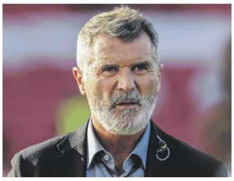
Michael Savage
Media editor

With a podcasting empire and a new deal that will make his football punditry show a regular fixture on Netflix, there seems little left for Gary Lineker to wish for.

However, while the former Match of the Day presenter is full of praise for Alan Shearer and Micah Richards - the fellow pundits on his The Rest is Football show - Lineker has admitted to admiring a combative figure playing for his main rivals.

Asked which of the many football pundits he would want to poach, Lineker admitted that Roy Keane’s brutal delivery and viral rants meant the former Manchester United captain would be his dream signing.

“He’s box office,” Lineker said during an appearance at the Edinburgh TV festival, before joking that, analytically, the Irishman “doesn’t give you that much”.



“He’s bloody good at being Roy Keane,” he said. “I’ve met Roy a few times. He’s really sweet … he just plays a character and he’s good at it. He’s really good at it, and he obviously knows his [stuff]. I was kidding about the analytical thing, a little bit.”

Keane is a member of a podcast team that has emerged as Lineker’s main opposition - Gary Neville’s The Overlap operation, which includes the Stick to Football show. Soon after The Rest is Football signed up with Netflix, Stick to Football announced a similar deal with Disney.

▲ *Gary Lineker told the Edinburgh TV festival he’s an admirer of the presenting style of Roy Keane, left*
PHOTOGRAPH: JASON ALDEN/BLOOMBERG/GETTY

While the rivalry is good natured, a tongue-in-cheek Lineker couldn’t help but add a slice of football needle, saying Keane “probably would” sign up for his show.

“You’ve got Gary [Neville] and his team, you’ve got Piers Morgan and his team [making the World Cup Uncensored] show, and they’re just trying to copy,” Lineker joked. “They’re trailing in our wake.”

Deals bringing football podcasts to the world’s biggest streaming services are a sign of a thirst for sports content. Given the huge cost of live rights, punditry is a popular option.

> *‘Roy Keane is really sweet … he just plays a character and he’s good at it’*
>
> **Gary Lineker**
> *The Rest is Football host*

The Rest is Football appeared in Netflix’s daily top 10 charts on every day of its 40-day run of daily episodes filmed during the World Cup, with the partnership now extended for the domestic season.

The Rest is Football obtained more than 7m monthly streams for its content alone last season, leading Lineker to joke that Neville’s outfit was “languishing miles behind”.

Lineker was interviewed on stage about his transition from footballer to presenter to media mogul, as co-founder of the successful podcast stable Goalhanger. During the appearance, he explained why he continued to speak out on political issues, particularly Gaza.

In the past week, the Telegraph criticised him for reposting a video of Tony Greenstein, an anti-Zionist who was cleared of inviting support for Hamas. In the video, the activist said: “Zionism is in the tradition of the Nazis who persecuted Jews.”

Lineker said: “I don’t think I speak much about politics, although politics is involved in everything that I speak about.

“I think ultimately you need to live with yourself and if I see things that upset me in humanitarian terms, then I find it quite upsetting, and it triggers me to use a platform that I would never have had before … People can disagree and that’s absolutely fine.”

FIVE SEARCH FOR THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE

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Thunderstorms could disrupt travel this week, forecasters warn

Press Association

Intense thunderstorms and heavy rain across much of England and Wales could cause travel disruption this week, forecasters have warned.

The Met Office said a band of heavy showers and thunderstorms was expected to move northwards this morning.

The weather service said humid conditions will bring an increasing chance of heavy showers, thunderstorms and longer spells of rain.

This follows hot weather across the UK that coincided with extremely dry conditions, with drought being declared in nearly three-quarters of England and the whole of Wales.

The Met Office has previously said the UK was on course for its hottest summer on record after five heatwaves, with temperatures of up to 38.1C recorded in London.

The RAC said risks to drivers from slippery roads after rainfall are "much greater right now".

It added that oil, fuel and rubber deposits that have built up will now have been mixed together by light rain, which means drivers are at greater risk of skidding.

The Met Office chief forecaster, Steve Willington, said: "There is a growing risk of heavy rain and thunderstorms, with warm and humid air helping to trigger heavy showers and thunderstorms.

"Some places could see significant amounts of rain falling in a short period of time, bringing the potential for localised flooding, travel disruption and frequent lightning.

"There remains some uncertainty around where the heaviest rain will fall, so it is important to keep up to date with the latest forecast."

A yellow warning for thunderstorms has been issued from 3am to 10pm today across much of England including London and the south-east, the Midlands, East Anglia, and parts of the north-west and south-west, as well as eastern parts of Wales.

COME AND ENJOY OUR BEER GARDEN

▶ *Lightning above Ilchester, Somerset. There is a risk of storms and heavy rain this week in parts of England and Wales*

PHOTOGRAPH: GRAHAM HUNT/ALAMY

The Met Office warned that showers and thunderstorms this afternoon "may be intense", with 20-30mm rain falling in less than an hour and 40-50mm being possible in two to three hours in a few spots, leading to some surface water flooding.

The weather service said there is a "small risk of flooding and disruption" from thunderstorms today, including possible damage to some buildings from floodwater, lightning strikes or hail.

It added that spray and sudden flooding could lead to difficult driving conditions and some road closures.

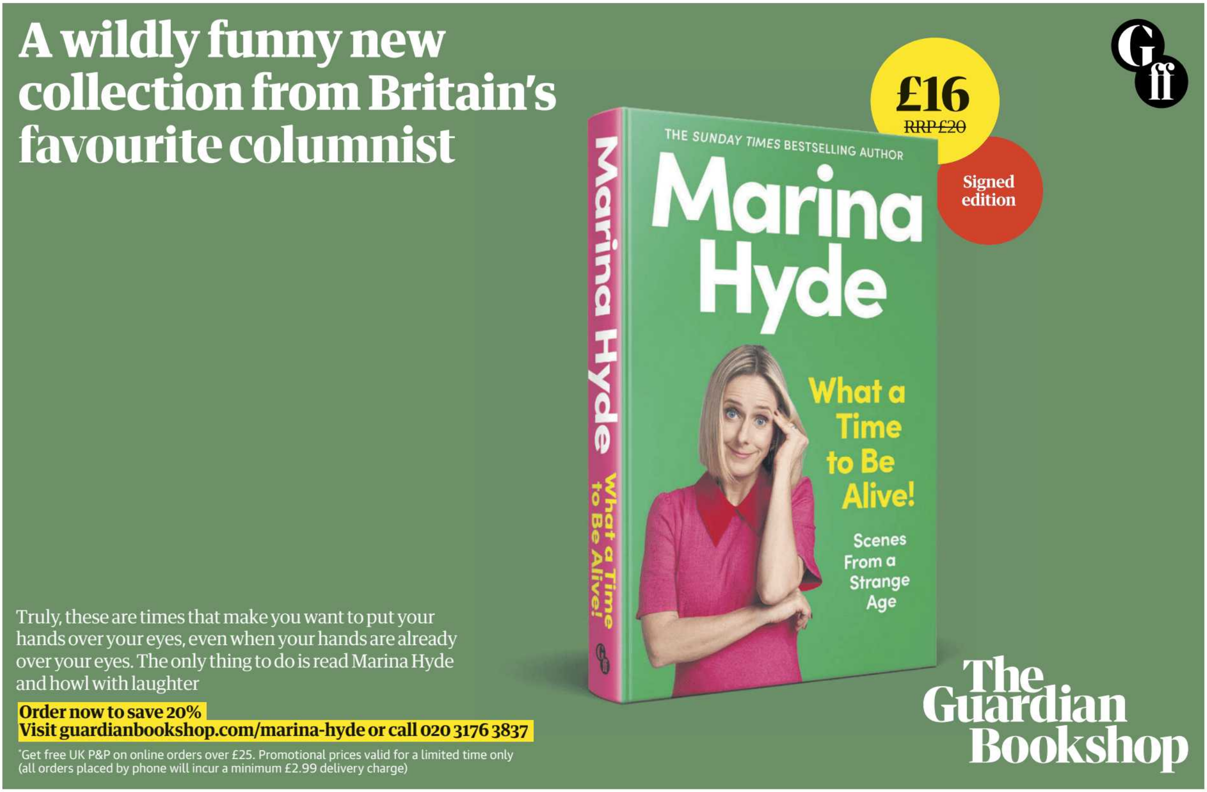
Large hail and frequent lightning are also possible before showers and thunderstorms drift northwards and ease during this evening.

The Met Office has advised people to "ensure moveable objects or temporary structures are well secured" before gusty winds arrive, including bins, garden furniture, trampolines, tents, gazebos, sheds and fences.

A further yellow warning for thunderstorms has been issued from 6am to 10pm tomorrow across large parts of England.

The Met Office said 20-30mm of rain in three hours is "expected fairly widely" and up to 50mm in a 12-hour period can be expected in places.

Unsettled conditions may continue into Friday and the weekend, with further showers or longer spells of rain possible at times.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'We want justice' The residents still paying for homes destroyed in fire

▼ *The Spectrum Building fire in east London on 26 August 2024 left more than 80 people homeless*

PHOTOGRAPH: REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

Jessica Murray
Social affairs correspondent

Sarah Williams vividly remembers the night in 2016 when she camped overnight in a car park to put down a deposit on a flat in the newly completed Spectrum Building in Dagenham, east London.

"People started queuing for those flats 24 hours before they went on sale," she said. "It was basically the only flat I could afford in London. This was a year before Grenfell, and the flat market in London was completely crazy."

Four years later, her flat became unsellable when they realised it was covered in dangerous flammable cladding. Another four years and it, like Grenfell Tower in west London back in 2017, had burned down.

It has now been two years since the Spectrum Building fire on 26 August 2024, which left more than 80 people homeless. They were forced to flee a blaze that broke out in the early hours of the morning fuelled by the scaffolding that covered the building while the cladding was being replaced.

Williams, like many leaseholders, is stuck in a legal limbo, paying the mortgage on a flat that no longer exists, with no idea how much she will get back. The building's freeholder, Arinium Ltd, went bankrupt shortly after the fire, and administrators are now responsible for distributing any remaining money, including insurance payouts.

"We still haven't got our money and we have no idea whether it will even cover the value of the flats," said Williams, a charity worker. "We don't know when we're going to get it. We've still got to pay our mortgages. We've still got to pay our rent. So many people have told us: 'It's terrible what happened to you, and this is a priority for us.' But our lives are still on hold."

▲ *Sarah Williams, a charity worker, is still paying a mortgage for her Spectrum flat which no longer exists. Left, James Allchurch owned two flats in the building*

PHOTOGRAPHS: JILL MEAD/THE GUARDIAN; ANTONIO OLMOS/THE GUARDIAN

James Allchurch, who owned two flats that burned down in the fire, said the arduous legal process was compounding the trauma many experienced that night. He and his partner ran from their third-floor flat when he woke up to see embers and blue flashing lights outside the window.

"We just grabbed whatever clothes we had and ran out the building, leaving everything behind. The last thing you think is, we'll never go back in our flat," he said.

"It wears you down. I still have nightmares about the fire, I have nightmares about watching our building being demolished, losing everything.

"There's an underlying sense of anxiety that has been with me most days since that fire."

Leaseholders are also concerned that if the freeholder is prosecuted over fire safety breaches and ultimately fined that money could come out of the pot of money that would otherwise be distributed to them.

Allchurch said: "You want some justice, you want to feel that someone's taking responsibility and there's accountability. But the result of that might be that we're all thousands of pounds worse off."

Residents are also angry at the painfully slow pace of work to replace flammable cladding on buildings across the country.

The day after the fire, the then deputy prime minister, Angela Rayner, said cladding remediation was going "far too slowly" and vowed to "speed up the process". But the number of buildings in need of cladding remediation where work has started or been completed has only increased from 50% to 53% in the past two years.

"I don't want anybody else to go through this," said Williams. "Do not stand in front of my smouldering building saying this is a priority then fail to follow up on that. I expected fast and urgent action, but I haven't seen that for the residents of Spectrum and I haven't seen that for the country."

Giles Grover, the co-lead of the End Our Cladding Scandal campaign group, said: "Progress has been very slow in the last couple of years. It feels like Labour prioritised building 1.5m homes, but has swept ending the building safety crisis under the carpet. But this fire was a warning, and they need to heed it. There's hundreds of thousands of people still living in unsafe buildings."

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government was contacted for comment.

South Yorkshire man dies while fighting for Russia in Ukraine

Raphael Boyd

A man from South Yorkshire is believed to be the first British citizen to die fighting for Russia in its war against Ukraine.

Bradley Townsend, 33, a fisher from Barnsley, left Britain in April to join up with Russian separatists in eastern Donbas, despite having no previous combat experience or ties to eastern Europe.

Alongside Ben Stimson, 49, and Aiden Minnis, 39, Townsend was granted Russian citizenship for joining the military campaign.

Townsend is believed to have been killed by a remote-controlled first-person-view drone near Lyman, a city in Donetsk, on 10 June. He had appeared in videos posted to social media by pro-Russian accounts, including one seemingly owned by Stimson, who had been jailed in the UK in 2015 for travelling to join pro-Russian troops to fight in the region.

Although Townsend's death was only widely reported on Monday, unconfirmed reports that he had been killed began circulating in June. One pro-Russian report described him as a "warrior in a holy war".

One former friend posted on social media that Townsend, who was understood to have struggled with his mental health and addiction, was a "normal guy" who had been "indoctrinated" by people who "saw his vulnerability as an opportunity to recruit him into their twisted cause". Another said he was "brainwashed" by his fellow British defectors.

In videos, Townsend could be seen describing himself as a "normal working-class lad from Yorkshire" and laughing with Stimson and Minnis as the trio drank and played cards. He posted that the Donbas miners had donated to miners in Yorkshire during strikes in the 1980s and he intended to "repay that favour".

Minnis described Townsend as "our beloved comrade-in-arms" who went "into the storm and fell on the battlefield", while comparing Ukrainians to Nazis, a common theme used in Russian propaganda. He said Townsend "sacrificed his life for our cause. His service was brief but he blazed the brightest star."

▲ *Bradley Townsend said fighting for Russia was 'my own decision'*

Townsend, who reportedly told his family he was travelling to Romania, had defended his decision to go to Russia on social media. He wrote: "I came with the idea that I probably wouldn't be able to go home. I'd definitely get persecuted if I went back.

"I'm not here for a suicide mission, but I understand that's what can happen. This was my own decision, I wasn't pushed into anything."

The Foreign Office said it was supporting Townsend's family.

New tricks: dogs blink more when they see owners doing so

Nicola Davis
Science Correspondent

Stare into a dog's eyes and you may encounter a bemused expression. But researchers have found that dogs blink more often when they see their owners doing so, suggesting there may be more to the mutual gaze than meets the eye.

Scientists have previously found that dogs turn on the puppy eyes when humans look at them, and that their brains can distinguish happy human faces from other expressions – even telling apart fearful faces from those that are angry or sad.

But while previous work has suggested dogs and humans may synchronise their blinking, and dogs may blink more when interacting with their owners rather than a familiar trainer, questions have remained over whether human blinking affects how often dogs bat their eyelashes.

Dr Chiara Canori, the first author of the new study, from the University of Parma, said: "What we wanted to do here was experimentally isolate the human blink and separate it from all the other things that normally happen during a real social interaction, which has never been done before."

Writing in the journal Royal Society Open Science, Canori and colleagues report how they analysed recordings of 35 dogs of different breeds as each was shown two types of video.

◀ *Researchers stressed owners shouldn't ascribe fixed meanings to their dogs' individual blinks*

MAIN PHOTOGRAPH: JAROMIR CHALABALA/ALAMY

Both videos lasted 40 seconds and showed three people, one at a time: the dog's owner and two unfamiliar humans. In one video, the humans each blinked once every three seconds, and in the other video they looked straight ahead without blinking.

The results reveal dogs blinked more often when the on-screen humans blinked than when they did not.

Further analysis found dogs only increased their rate of blinking when they were shown their owners blinking compared with when they displayed a still gaze – an effect that was not seen for strangers.

"This suggests that the social relevance of the partner matters," said Canori, adding the results are not explained by dogs looking at their owners for longer.

The team found no evidence that the dogs synchronised their blinking with that of humans.

Canori said the findings suggest blinking – an important mechanism for protecting the eye and keeping it moist – may have acquired a social relevance.

"As of today, however, we cannot say that a dog deliberately blinks in order to convey a particular message," she said. "It may provide subtle feedback about attention or engagement and perhaps help coordinate an interaction with another individual, particularly with a socially important partner."

Canori stressed owners should not interpret an individual blink as having a specific, fixed meaning.

"Our study does not show that every time a dog blinks it is deliberately 'saying' something," she said. "What our work suggests is that this apparently simple and automatic behaviour can nevertheless be influenced by the social context. Dogs appear sensitive to blinking in other individuals, and their own blinking can change depending on who they are interacting with."

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Stina Otterström and Arttu Lahtinen perform a series of fiddly duets

PHOTOGRAPH: MURDO MACLEOD/ THE GUARDIAN

> *They remain demure, just the odd glance or smile, an occasional teasing amid their reliance on one another*

Stage review Wine glass circus acrobats show plenty of bottle

Soft Spot

Zoo Southside, Edinburgh

★★★☆☆

Chris Wiegand

This Swedish circus two-hander begins with the performers offstage, and what sounds like the high-pitched notes of a glass harp. But the wine glasses here - first six of them, then dozens - are used for acrobatic tricks rather than music.

Stina Otterström is a handstand artist, Arttu Lahtinen is a juggler. Together, they execute a series of increasingly fiddly, full-bodied duets. Otterström's strength is immediately contrasted with the fragility of this most familiar, yet hazardous, of props.

Her first inversions involve holding the stems between her toes, passing them from one foot to the other, or balancing their bases on her soles. Lahtinen gives us variations on the tablecloth pull-trick and the buzz wire game, balancing glasses on planks of wood that he glides perilously close around Otterström's body. Empty glasses are expertly slid, tossed, stacked and stood upon. Have we no wine here?

This is a restrained hour presented by OLO Company and Cluster Arts. It could sometimes benefit from more of a showperson's - or even a sommelier's - flair. The abundantly skilled pair remain demure throughout, just the odd glance or smile acknowledging their feats, an occasional teasing amid their steadfast reliance on one another.

For too long it plays in one register, without quite enough variation in Mika Forsling's nevertheless appealing music. Any notion of narrative or autobiography is absent. That's not necessarily a problem if you're embracing a fuller variety of tricks and tones - as in Compagnie Nyash's Stoel, with a duo and 15 mismatched chairs that take on their own personalities. It's harder to achieve with identikit glasses.

If a richness of mystery or ritual is absent, then the fizz among the tricks includes the mock-solemn arrival of a brush to tidy up a breakage, unexpectedly supplemented by a pile of broken glasses. That crunchy noise is much more atmospheric than an earlier recorded sound effect.

These shards are eventually swept around the stage to form a striking surround for the final tricks, performed barefoot (eek!) and dramatically lit by Jaakko Sirainen. That stylish sequence would sparkle alongside other cabaret acts - and the wit in the curtain-call speech shows this pair could create a happier hour.

Until Sunday

Harington replaces Hoult as celebrity wizard in Potter series

Nadia Khomami

Kit Harington will replace Nicholas Hoult in HBO's Harry Potter television series, after the Skins actor left the show due to scheduling conflicts.

Harington will play Gilderoy Lockhart, the vain and inept Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, in the season based on Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, the second novel in JK Rowling's series. The change was announced just two weeks after Hoult was confirmed for the role.

Hoult, who played Lex Luthor in the recent Superman film, was released from the Harry Potter production after its filming schedule conflicted with his other commitments.

Harington is best known for playing Jon Snow in Game of Thrones.

He voiced Lockhart in Audible's full-cast adaptation of The Chamber of Secrets, released in 2025, and said recently that he was a longstanding Harry Potter fan, describing Lockhart as one of his favourite characters.

"I'm thrilled," Harington told Collider. "I've said a million times, for anyone who cares, that I'm a huge Potter fan.

"He's one of my favourite characters. So, to be offered to play him is a real dream. I think he's going to be so fun … He's just a wonderful creation."

Lockhart is a celebrity wizard and prolific author whose reputation is built on heroic exploits that, it emerges, were largely the work of other witches and wizards. He was previously played by Kenneth Branagh in the 2002 film adaptation.

Kit Harington is known for playing Jon Snow in Game of Thrones

The first season, Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, is due to premiere on 25 December. Production on the second season is scheduled to begin this autumn.

The series also stars John Lithgow as Albus Dumbledore, Nick Frost as Rubeus Hagrid and Paapa Essiedu as Severus Snape.

Harington is the latest change to the cast. Gracie Cochrane, who plays Ginny Weasley in the first season, will be replaced for its second season.

Hoult, along with other cast members, has faced a backlash for his decision to join the show from those opposed to Rowling's views on sex and gender.

Cheka offers more storytelling than laugh-out-loud standup

Comedy review Frank catchup with pregnant standup

Kate Cheka: The Last Funny Woman

Voodoo Rooms, Edinburgh

★★★★☆

Anya Ryan

Kate Cheka wasn't supposed to be here. After her debut hour two years ago, she swore she would never do the fringe again. But now she's back, mic in hand and eight months pregnant. She does it all with mountains of energy - if you thought the fringe was exhausting, just imagine doing all this with a baby on board.

But, as she will tell us later, maybe there's a reason she wants to give everything she has to her last pre-birth show. In an hour that's more storytelling than laugh-out-loud standup, she weaves in political eye-rolls, thoughts on the rise of the far right and her tendency to date white men with access to property.

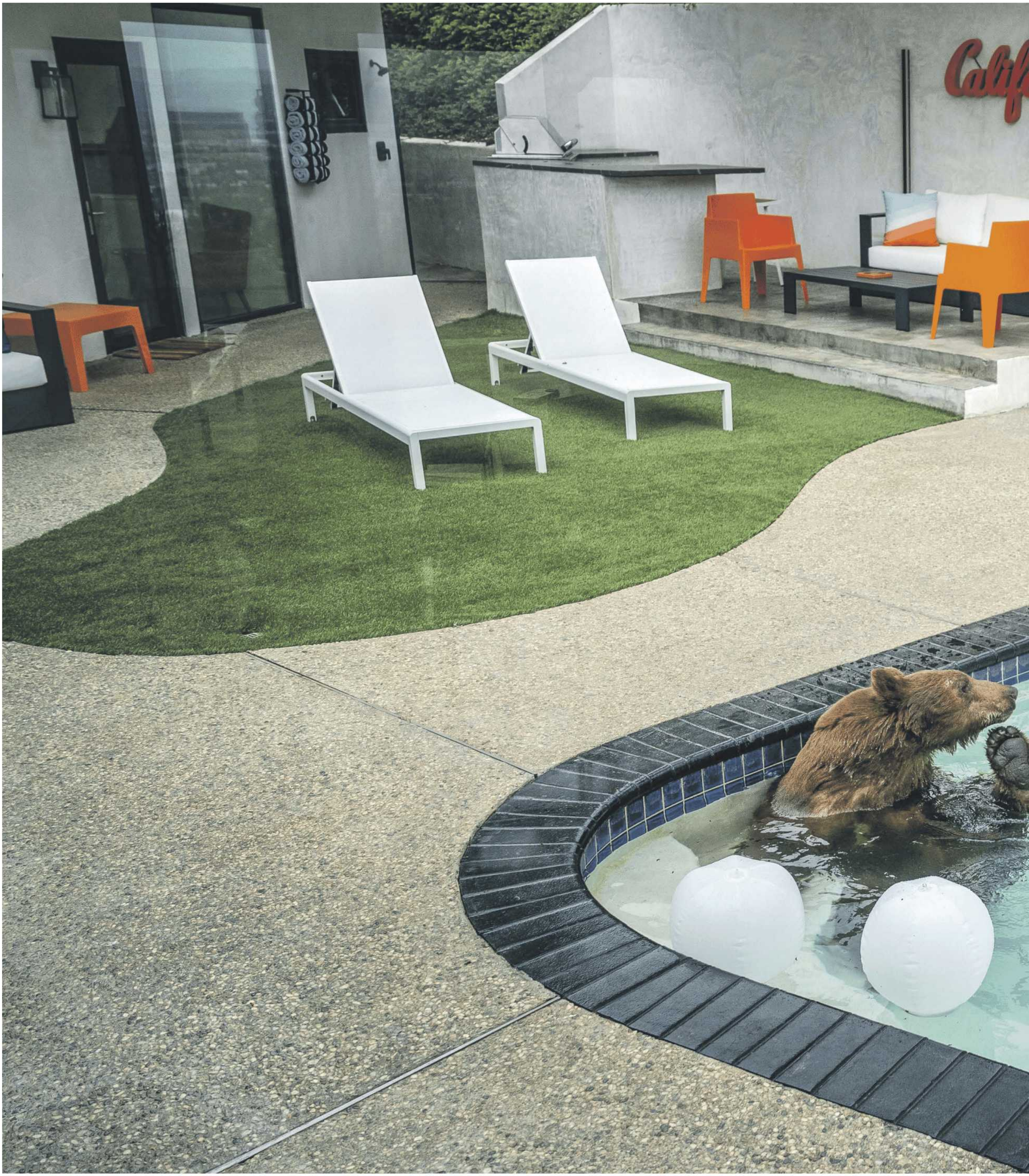
The world is pretty darn depressing. Still, she remains a "good time girl", which has led to some drunken sexual encounters. "Most comedians write jokes," she says. "I live life like a joke." Her pregnancy story is held back until just the right moment.

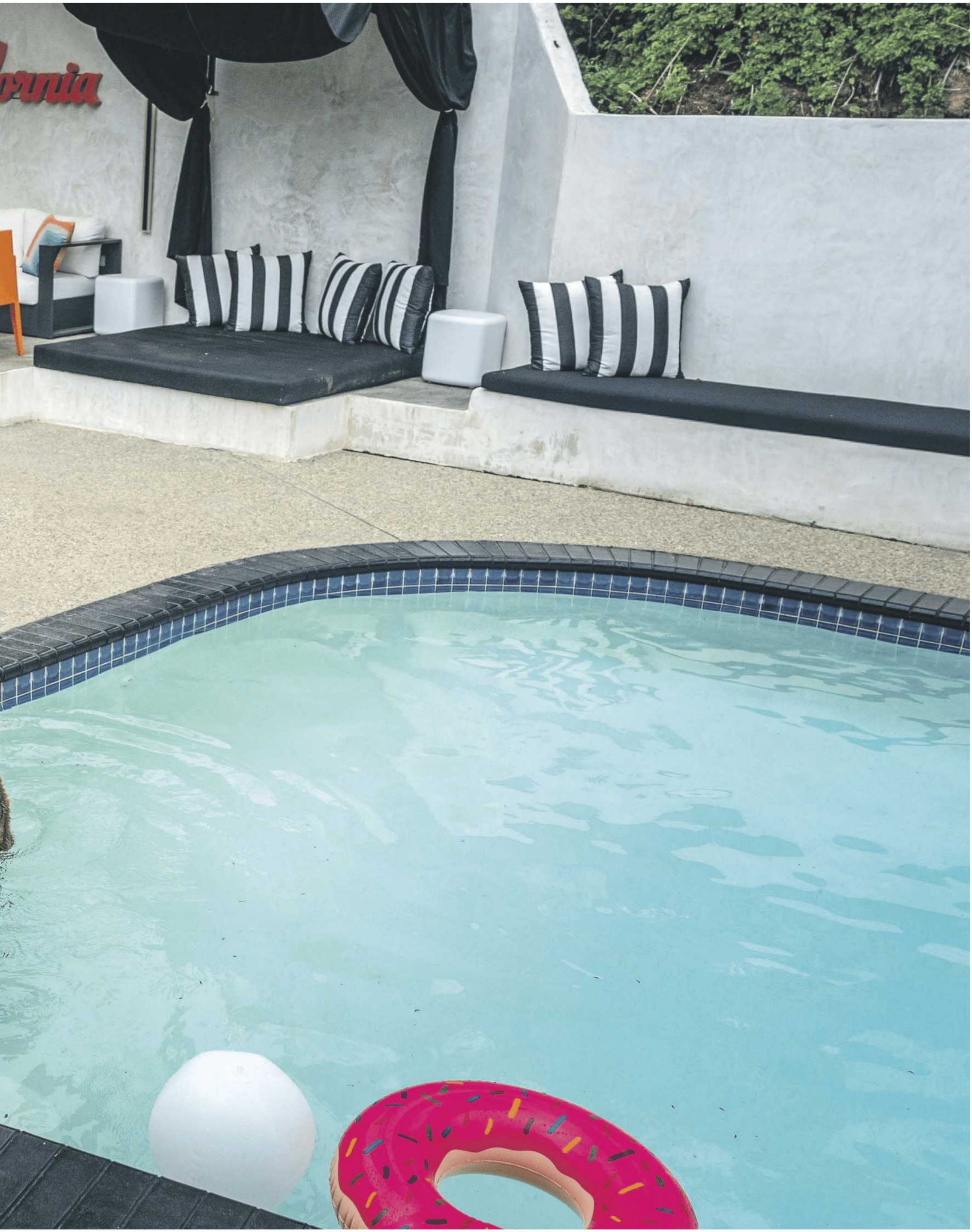
She does all this in the style of a pub catchup. But despite her giggling, girlish demeanour, Cheka has big, often unheard things to say about the state of comedy. Her career is not going well, she tells us. Even though she's started booking slots on radio, she's finding her lefty political feelings are not being met with applause. Things are made harder by the fact she's a Black, working-class comedian.

She has worked hard and won awards, yet TV execs still lure her into Zoom calls only to build up her dreams and crush them. Cheka deserves her comedy flowers, but the final 15 minutes of this show are anything but funny. The tears rolling down her cheeks should get the industry looking inward. Let's hope there are more opportunities to hear Cheka, in all her glory.

Until 30 August

Eyewitness





Bear necessities

A black bear takes a dip in a swimming pool in Monrovia, California. The photograph, titled Pooltime Pastime, is highly commended in the urban wildlife category of the 62nd Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition, the exhibition for which opens in October at the Natural History Museum in London.

PHOTOGRAPH: LOREN ELLIOTT/ WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR/PA

Hezbollah v the state Lebanon's fight for legitimacy amid Israeli occupation

William Christou and Ali Awada *Beirut*

Fatima al-Ashkar used toys to explain to her children that their father had been killed. She arranged toy soldiers in a mock battle and picked up an airplane, miming an air raid on the plastic men below.

"I started explaining to them: 'Israel came and bombed here. Daddy was here. Daddy was martyred. Daddy was protecting us from Israel,'" said al-Ashkar, a 26-year-old resident of Markaba, south Lebanon. Her husband, Mohammed Ali, who was a member of Hezbollah, was killed fighting Israel in the region in early April.

But the young widow was not alone in shouldering the burden of her sudden loss. The sophisticated machinery of Hezbollah's social support system soon stepped in.

Hezbollah's martyr foundation found and furnished an apartment for al-Ashkar and her children in the southern suburbs of Beirut, covering the rent in full. It continues to provide stipends for each child, pay their school fees and cover healthcare costs for the whole family.

Every so often, representatives of the foundation will visit al-Ashkar's home and sit with her and the children for psychological support sessions. "[Hezbollah] is standing by us," said al-Ashkar. "They do everything for us."

It was not the state that al-Ashkar, and other residents of south Lebanon who were displaced or lost loved ones in the war, turned to, it was Hezbollah. Many did so because they believed in it; others because the absence of the state left them little alternative.

As the Lebanese state tries to reassert its authority, it finds the country deeply divided. It faces a challenge that extends far beyond disarming Hezbollah, which the US and Israel are pushing it to do. The state must contend with Hezbollah's deep-rooted social welfare system and persuade its supporters that it can provide security - even as Israeli occupation and attacks undermine the state's claim that it can protect Lebanon.

The latest round of war has hardened existing divisions over Hezbollah. The group's supporters accuse the government of humiliating Lebanon by negotiating directly with Israel and not responding to its attacks. Hezbollah's opponents blame the group for provoking a war by launching rockets at Israel on 2 March, triggering Israel's invasion and current occupation.

▲ *A woman in front of her home, destroyed by an Israeli airstrike in Zawtar al-Gharbiyah* PHOTOGRAPH: ABDUL KADER AL BAY/ZUMA PRESS/SHUTTERSTOCK

"Honestly, I don't care about the state," said al-Ashkar. "Before, we used to say: 'They should speak, they should do something.' Now, whether they speak, or don't speak, it makes no difference to us."

Her home was blown up during a nominal ceasefire between Hezbollah and Israel in 2024 and her village was occupied by Israel until its withdrawal in 2000.

For Mustapha Hamze, a 66-year-old doctor from the outskirts of Nabatieh, a stronger state would make a difference. Neither Hezbollah's weapons nor the government's diplomacy has helped him get into his home, which he fled in the early days of the war. The last time he tried, an Israeli drone fired on him.

"Israel says it wants peace, that's a lie," said Hamze. "But Hezbollah also needs wars, these groups live through war. They have weapons and they take everything from you. They resemble one another. There is no other strong political organisation.

"[Hezbollah] wants everyone to be with them and under their wing, anything else is unacceptable."

But Hamze also has little faith in the state's ability to defend his rights. He has applied for safe passage to visit his home through the Lebanese army, which has a place in a deconfliction mechanism that includes Israel, but has yet to receive it. Lebanese officials know one of their biggest challenges will be convincing people to place their faith in the state - particularly Hezbollah supporters.

A senior Lebanese security official said on condition of anonymity: "This needs to be a whole-of-government approach. For supporters of Hezbollah, you are talking about three generations of social indoctrination. You have to start with the culture, then inclusion in government, and then we can talk about security."

The Lebanese government is using the three "pilot zones" - areas handed back to the Lebanese army from Israeli occupation - as prototypes of communities where it is trying to rebuild trust in the state. Reconstruction in these areas, mostly destroyed by Israeli shelling, is following a different blueprint from previous wars. The army is not allowing the southern council, a government body closely tied to the Hezbollah-allied Amal movement, to conduct reconstruction, as was the case in the past.

◀ *A damaged mosque in Zawtar al-Gharbiyah, one of the pilot zones under a ceasefire agreed between Israel and Lebanon* PHOTOGRAPH: WAEL HAMZEH/EPA

Instead, it is the Lebanese army taking charge of rebuilding roads and repairing infrastructure. This way, the security official said, the state is visible and citizens will turn to Beirut, rather than Hezbollah. And the army can fulfil its obligations under the pilot zone agreement by ensuring that infrastructure projects are not being used for military purposes.

But the state's narrative is undermined every time Israel shells Lebanese land - which happens several times a day - and it does not respond. Last week, Israeli troops blew up a municipal building, a public school and a clinic in eastern Zawtar, in view of one of the three pilot zones, Zawtar al-Gharbiyah. The cash-strapped state also cannot match Hezbollah's extensive social services.

Tia Abdalah, a displaced resident from the border village of Aitaroun, said: "We got medical treatment, free medicine, blood tests from Hezbollah and Samidoun [an affiliated aid group]. As for the state, we haven't had anything from them. And the army's hands were tied by the government." Although she was not affiliated with Hezbollah, she said the group gave her family monthly cash stipends as well as aid boxes.

Lebanese officials are painfully aware of the limits of their ability to stop Israeli bombing; they are determined to go through the diplomatic process regardless. But without Israel's withdrawal from south Lebanon, they fear the legitimacy of the state will collapse.

"The pilot zones won't work unless there is a clear timetable for withdrawal," said the security official. "We want to push out Hezbollah, but we don't want to appear as if we are playing the role of the South Lebanese Army," he added, referencing Israel's proxy that aided its occupation of south Lebanon from the 1980s until 2000.

To people such as al-Ashkar, whose husband died in what she sees as the fight to defend Lebanon, the state offers little promise of security. "[Israel] calls [the army] on the telephone and tells them: 'Leave the village,' so they leave the village," she said. "Then there's nobody left defending it ... Sometimes you feel they're working for the Israelis."

Venetian 'oasis'
Island for sale – but price tag under wraps
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Castle in the sky
Japan enlists public to drag castle on rollers
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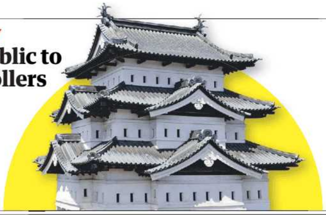
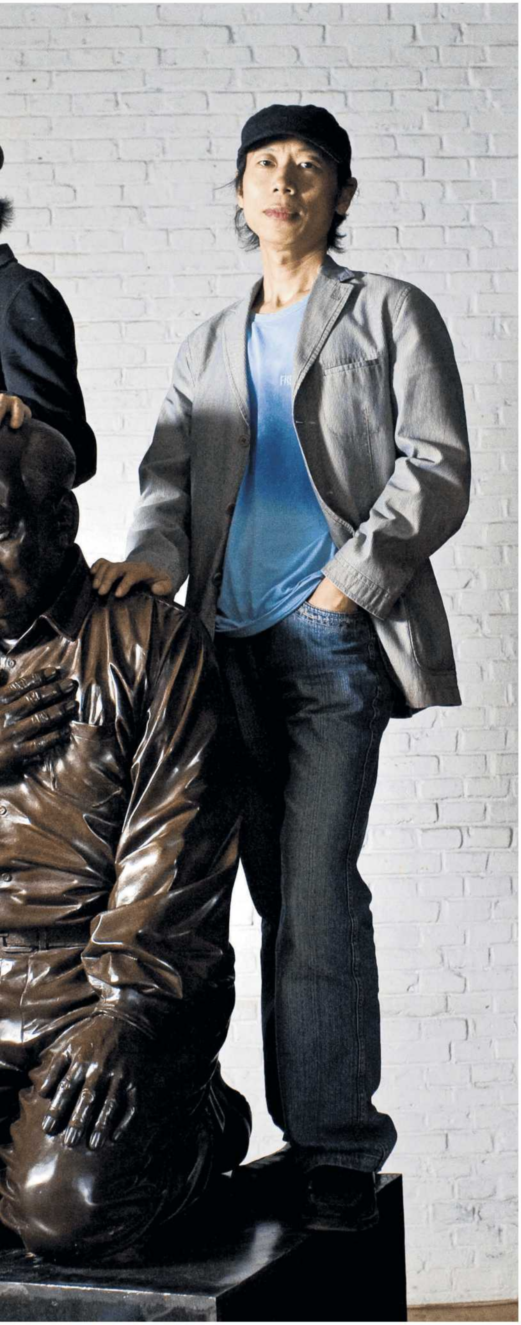




Sculptor jailed for 'slandering China's heroes'

Danny Vincent
Taipei

A prominent Chinese artist has been sentenced to three years in prison for slandering China's "heroes and martyrs" two years after he was detained while visiting the country, according to his wife and human rights groups.

The trial of Gao Zhen, 70, who is known for provocative sculptures of Mao Zedong, has attracted international condemnation, largely because the artworks at the centre of the case were created more than 10 years before China created the law under which he was charged.

Courts have previously used the law, which came into force in 2018, to charge people who challenge official accounts of Chinese history.

Gao, a Chinese citizen and US permanent resident who makes art with his younger brother Gao Qiang as the Gao brothers, was detained on 26 August 2024 during a visit to China with his wife and son. Police later raided his studio near Beijing.

In one of the brothers' most famous works, Mao is depicted kneeling. In another, a firing squad made up of seven Mao statues point rifles at Jesus.

Gao's wife, Zhao Yaliang, said the years since her husband's detention had been an ordeal for the family. "His arrest and trial should never have happened. We have had no choice but to wait in anguish … I'm very sad it's going to be this long."

According to Zhao, two of Gao's relatives were allowed to enter the Sanhe city people's court in Hebei province for the verdict, while she waited with their son and several friends outside. "For two years he has suffered in the detention centre, while my son, our closest family members and I have also endured this torment," she said.

Gao's family said he had fainted in detention and was afflicted with back, knee and respiratory problems. His wife said Gao had heatstroke during the summer and described feeling "close to death".

Weiquanwang, a human rights monitoring network, said Gao had been sentenced for "infringing the reputation and honour of heroes and martyrs". The rights network said Gao's studio and property had been sealed, and that friends and supporters had been silenced.

Artworks made by Gao during his time in detention and seen by the Guardian include a series of colourful paper cuttings.

"A body can be confined, but clarity of mind is harder to take away. Mentally, he remains remarkably sharp and unbroken," said Gao Qiang.

"Can any Chinese writer, filmmaker, scholar, or artist ever be certain that something they created 10 or 20 years ago will not become a crime under tomorrow's political standard?

"Art should never be a crime scene waiting to be discovered," he said.

In a handwritten letter sent from detention to his young son, Gao wrote: "Dad's eyesight isn't very good, and I don't have my glasses, so my handwriting isn't very good.

"I hope I can finish my work as soon as possible and return to you and Mum … Son, remember: Dad will always love you!"

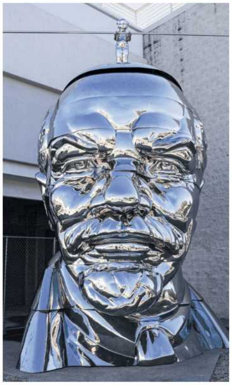
Sophie Richardson, a longtime China human rights campaigner, said: "Gao has been prosecuted for conduct that has never been criminal, and his family has endured collective punishment at the hands of the authorities, and that is criminal."

Sarah Brooks, China director for Amnesty International, said sentencing Gao to a maximum three-year term illustrated "the authorities' determination to deter others from engaging in independent artistic expression".

Gao's wife and their young son have been unable to leave China. Rights campaigners said Zhao was stopped from travelling abroad on national security grounds. His son is a US citizen but has been unable to leave without his parents.

The Chinese foreign ministry was approached for comment.

Additional reporting
Yu-chen Li



◀ *The sculpture Mao's Guilt by Gao Zhen, left, and Gao Qiang, right, in Beijing, China, in 2009; above, a giant sculpture of Lenin by the Gao brothers sits in front of the ACE Gallery in Los Angeles*

MAIN PHOTOGRAPH: SHIHO FUKADA/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX/EYEVINE

Colombia cracks down on 'illegal' immigration

Tiago Rogero
South America correspondent

Colombia's far-right president, Abelardo de la Espriella, has announced a crackdown on immigrants, ordering authorities to detain and deport people who are in the country irregularly or have committed crimes.

In office for just over two weeks, the millionaire former lawyer made the announcement on Sunday as the country continued to grapple with the aftermath of a 7.4-magnitude earthquake on 10 August that killed more than 300 people and destroyed more than 30,000 homes.

De la Espriella said the first joint operations involving the police and the migration authority should begin "this very week". "Let the coordinated operations begin to track down illegal immigrants: first, those committing crimes; second, those who have not regularised their status and who will have to be deported immediately," he said during a cabinet meeting in Barranquilla, the Caribbean city that has in effect been turned into an alternative capital.

He echoed the "Americans first" rhetoric of his ally Donald Trump, saying from now on it would be "Colombians first, Colombians second and Colombians third", joining other Trump-aligned leaders in the region who have tightened migration rules, including Argentina's Javier Milei and Chile's José Antonio Kast.

His order has been criticised by the opposition and human rights activists, who say it will end a migration policy that endured for more than a decade under both rightwing and leftwing governments and benefited migrants fleeing the humanitarian crisis in neighbouring Venezuela.

During his election campaign, he focused chiefly on his promise to pursue an iron-fist policy against criminal groups. In Sunday's announcement, he declared all gangs involved in drug trafficking, illegal mining, extortion and smuggling were "terrorists and we will treat them as such".

De la Espriella did not directly mention Venezuelans when discussing immigration, but they account for 90% of all migrants in the country.

The Colombian newspaper El Tiempo reported that sources in the migration department believed it did not have enough staff to carry out the promised operations. Analysts also note that under Colombian law there is no such category as an "illegal" immigrant, as De la Espriella said, but rather migrants in an "irregular" situation, since being in the country without the proper documentation is not a crime.

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Cockroach protests

The hunger strike that boosted a mass rebellion in India

ಮೋದಿ ವಿದೇಶದಲ್ಲಿ
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ಬಿಜೆಪಿ ಕೇಂದ್ರ ಸರ್ಕಾರ
#SonamWangchuk
DEMOCRACY

◀ *Young people and social activists in Bengaluru rally against the central government during the Cockroach movement protests*

PHOTOGRAPH: JAGADEESH NV/EPA

▲ *Indian police detain a protester in Mumbai. Top left, Sonam Wangchuk during his hunger strike*

MAIN PHOTOGRAPH: DIVYAKANT SOLANKI/EPA

Amrit Dhillon
Delhi

For 26 days, India watched as Sonam Wangchuk wasted away. His hunger strike, held in solidarity with India's "Cockroach" youth protest movement, would prove to be one of the most politically consequential fasts held in the country's modern history.

Many in the country view the gruelling fast, which began on 28 June, as the spark that helped propel the Cockroach movement into one of the most formidable challenges to the government of prime minister, Narendra Modi, in more than a decade.

Abhijeet Dipke, the founder of the Cockroach movement, said Wangchuk had "awakened the conscience of an entire nation" through his sacrifice.

The Cockroach movement was launched in May, following the cancellation of a key nationwide exam to enter medical college after a paper was leaked. The cancellation was devastating for the 2 million students who had already sat the exam, a dozen of whom reportedly took their lives.

The movement took its name from comments made by India's chief justice, Surya Kant, who had compared some unemployed young people to cockroaches and parasites in a court hearing.

Dipke's demand that the education minister, Dharmendra Pradhan, show accountability for the leak by resigning struck a nerve, and anger that was seething below the surface surged on to the streets.

The protest ballooned into a nationwide movement. For weeks, deadlock prevailed between the government and Dipke, who was backed by thousands who flocked to his sit-in protest in Delhi. Eventually, after an unprecedented police crackdown that further influenced public opinion, the protesters triumphed and Pradhan resigned on 25 July.

The victory was not a foregone conclusion and Dipke has acknowledged the importance of Wangchuk's fast in the outcome. Unlike the students, Wangchuk was a well-known and respected figure, recognised for his decades-long efforts to secure educational reforms and environmental protection. Last year, he was arrested in Ladakh on charges of inciting anti-government protests. The timing was also key: crowds at the Delhi protest site had been thinning before he started his fast, injecting new energy and momentum into the movement.

> *'Young people have stripped away the curtain of fear. They are now engaged'*
>
> **Sonam Wangchuk**
> *Protester*

Wangchuk had declared he would not end his strike until the government responded to the demands of India's protesting youth. He lay outdoors at the protest site in the heart of Delhi, day and night, enduring rain, torturous heat and mosquitoes. Already a lean and slight figure, he lost 11kg over the 26 days.

"I felt confined, trapped … like a prison," he told the Guardian. "The heat and humidity were awful."

In the aftermath, Wangchuk, a softly spoken engineer, environmentalist and educationist, remains humble about his role. "I was a known entity and that helped," he said. His reverence is held for the hundreds of thousands of young people in the Cockroach movement, which he says has changed Indian politics for good.

Wangchuk says the Cockroach movement's success is far bigger than one resignation. In an era where dissent is criminalised, young people, he says, have seized the power of political protest.

"They have stripped away the curtain of fear that existed," he said. "They are now engaged. They have tasted success in getting results and I expect them to continue."

The 60-year-old admits the hunger strike took a gruelling toll. By the time he broke his fast on 24 July, he had pushed his body to the limit and was perilously close to organ failure. But as thousands of young people and politicians flocked to his side, his spirit remained unbroken throughout.

The greatest test, he says, came when he was forcibly removed by police from the protest site and taken to hospital against his will. Videos of his frail body being dragged away by burly police went viral and Wangchuk was hailed by young people online as a national hero. When protests erupted the next day, Wangchuk's name was chanted and held aloft on placards.

Wangchuk was not always an obvious figure of anti-government resistance. Born in Ladakh, he rose to international prominence as an engineer and environmentalist, best known for inventing the ice stupa, a unique technique for water storage in human-made glaciers. He became a prominent champion of the rights of Ladakhis and set up a school and cultural and environmental institution.

He had been a vocal supporter of several prominent policies of Modi's Bharatiya Janata party but support turned to resistance when he accused the party of failing the people of Ladakh. Last year, he was imprisoned for almost six months under draconian anti-terrorist laws.

While his focus has been on rebuilding his body in recent weeks, regaining about 60% of his previous weight, Wangchuk has also continued his call for political reform, albeit without any overt criticism of the Modi government.

In a video message, Wangchuk called for a "second independence movement" and urged Indians to choose people of "character and substance" to lead the country.

For now, he is back living quietly in Ladakh, finally able to enjoy the one food that lingered on his mind during his hunger strike. "I did dream of apricots," he said, "but that was just because I was wondering if mine back home had ripened."

Third drone found near Leipzig airport after attempted attack

Kate Connolly
Berlin

German investigators uncovered a third drone and suspected military explosives thought to be connected to an attempted attack on Leipzig airport, local media reported yesterday.

The drone was discovered in Kabelsketal, just to the west of the airport, along with about 50g (1.8oz) of a suspected military explosive on 14 August, 10 days after the unsuccessful sabotage. Leipzig airport is a cargo and military logistics hub used by Nato and Ukraine's Antonov Airlines for transporting military supplies.

The office of the prosecutor general, which is leading the investigation, declined to comment yesterday. But the German chancellor, Friedrich Merz, said the government would soon provide information about who it believed was behind the drone attacks.

"They will pay for this," Merz said, stopping short of naming a suspect, before a cabinet meeting in Brandenburg. He added that the government was "working intensively on this together with the security authorities and we will present our findings and comment on them shortly".

Intelligence sources cited by the broadcasters NDR and WDR and the newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung said they suspected the involvement of Russian intelligence in the attempted attack. Moscow has denied involvement.

The German government has so far avoided expressing a clear position as to whether it thinks Russia, or an actor close to it, is responsible.

Merz said the attempted attack showed that Germany was becoming a target. "Attackers are increasingly ruthlessly accepting even serious property damage, and even injuries and deaths," he said yesterday.

A drone carrying explosives was found on 4 August near a Ukrainian Antonov cargo plane used for military supplies. According to investigators, the drone was apparently intended to land on the aircraft, which was filled with kerosene, but the explosive device did not detonate.

Investigators say that about 20 minutes after the discovery of the first drone, a second drone possibly collided with a DHL cargo plane, which was forced to abort its landing manoeuvre and was diverted to Marseille.

According to the latest media reports, an inspection of the DHL aircraft revealed damage to the tail section, suggesting a collision with an object. However, the drone has not yet been found. Investigators believe it could have been sucked into the engines after the collision and shredded into small pieces.

The third drone was found in a field in a municipality that directly borders the western edge of Leipzig airport. Forensic technicians from the federal criminal police office found residues of a substance that initial assessments indicated could have been the highly explosive substance hexogen.

This explosive also failed to detonate, but the investigators' report, according to the media reports, stated: "The perpetrators may have had a far larger attack in mind than previously known to the public."

Other suspicious traces and components were also discovered close to the airport, the report said. In Kursdorf, investigators found an antenna attached to a tree, and other electronic parts, which may have been used to control the drones. Close by and near where witnesses reported hearing a loud bang on the day of the incident, investigators discovered a burnt patch and charred metal parts.

If the drones had exploded, they could have caused a catastrophe, German officials said.

◀ *The island of Crevan features a fort, which has been converted into a villa with four bedrooms, vegetable and fruit gardens, an internal canal, and a helipad*
PHOTOGRAPH: LIONARD LUXURY REAL ESTATE

'Enchanting' Venetian island with Napoleonic fort up for sale

Angela Giuffrida
Rome

An island in the Venice lagoon boasting a Napoleonic fort and lush gardens is up for sale.

Described as an "enchanting oasis of peace and beauty", Crevan offers a "spectacular view" of Venice's main island, but is far from its crowds.

Located a few minutes by boat from the islands of Burano and Torcello and just slightly smaller than a standard football pitch, Crevan was built in 1806 by the French military during the Napoleonic era as a strategic outpost to defend the northern Venetian lagoon from the Austrian empire.

But in 1815 the island fell under Austrian rule before passing to the Italian state in 1866, after the annexation of Veneto to the Kingdom of Italy. Crevan continued to serve a military purpose until after the first world war.

After years of neglect, it was bought by a private owner and its buildings restored as residential properties.

Its most prominent feature is the Napoleonic fort, converted by the current owner into a small villa with four bedrooms and surrounded by manicured lawns and vegetable and fruit gardens and trees. There is also a private mooring along the island's small internal canal, and a helipad.

Crevan has been listed for sale by several top property agencies, including Lionard Luxury Real Estate and Dimora Italia Real Estate, an affiliate of Christie's International. The asking price, however, is strictly reserved for interested buyers.

"Crevan offers the privilege of withdrawing from the world without ever leaving the universal allure of Venice," Dimitri Corti, the founder and chief executive of Lionard Luxury Real Estate, said in a press release. "What one acquires is not simply a residence and a piece of land, but space, privacy and an entire landscape to preserve."

But Crevan has competition. Isola Santa Cristina, another island in the lagoon that for decades was owned by the heir to the Swarovski crystal empire, was put up for sale at about €24m (£20.5m) in June. The luxury retreat comes with a huge villa, a saltwater swimming pool and vineyards.

An octagonal-shaped island close to the Venice lido and dating back to the 1500s, when it was built as a defence post by the Republic of Venice, is also on the market.

Survivor of Sydney shark attack recalls 'monster'

Achol Arok

An Australian woman who lost an arm after a shark attack off a beach in Sydney's eastern suburbs has recalled the moment she came face to face with the "monster".

Leah Stewart, a 34-year-old teacher and mother of a one-year-old daughter, was attacked by a large shark while on a morning swim at Coogee beach on 13 June. She remained in a critical condition for more than two weeks while receiving treatment for life-threatening injuries that required the amputation of her arm.

Stewart recalled that her first thoughts during the attack were of her daughter. "It was holding on to my leg, then I just thought of August. I thought, 'She's not going to have a mum. She's going to grow up without a mum,'" she told Nine Entertainment. "I couldn't handle that. I didn't want her to not have a mum."

Stewart said the shark's "face was horrific" and that she would "never forget its face … it was a monster".

In an update to a fundraiser set up to cover her medical procedures and support her family, Stewart thanked donors. "I'm so happy that I've progressed enough to build some independence, and I can finally see some light after all of this," she wrote.

"I've been actively trying to do everything in my power to get back to some sort of normal life. I still have a long way to go, but my recovery has been remarkable, and a huge part of that is because of the absolute army of love, support, prayers and encouragement surrounding my family and me from all over the world."

The GoFundMe page raised more than AU$558,925 (£293,000). Donations have now been turned off.

"I want to say the biggest thank you for looking after me, for caring for my family, and for being generous enough to help my family through this," Stewart wrote. "What you've offered has given us enough to recover, to stay in our home, and to give us options for further medical treatment down the road."

Stewart said she felt as though she had been "given a second chance at life" as she ended the note. "I'm not going to waste it. As I get better, I know I'll make something of this second chance and aim to give back even more in generosity, care and love."

▲ *Leah Stewart said her first thought had been about her young daughter*

Hundreds help pull Japanese castle keep back into position

Gavin Blair
Tokyo

◀ *People pull Hirosaki Castle, above, back on rollers after it was moved in 2015 to repair a damaged wall*
PHOTOGRAPHS: KYODO NEWS/GETTY IMAGES

To chants of "so-re, so-re", about 1,800 people came together in northern Japan over the weekend to pull a 360-tonne castle keep a little more than two metres closer to its original resting place as part of ongoing renovations.

The keep had previously had to be moved to repair a wall that was damaged in a major earthquake.

Rotating teams of 80 people heaved on 30-metre ropes as the keep of Hirosaki Castle in Aomori prefecture edged closer to its destination. On Saturday participants towed the building – set on rails – 1.13m, while on Sunday it was shifted another 1.09m.

"We had about 8,000 applications for the 1,800 slots over the last two days, roughly four times oversubscribed, so not everyone could participate," said Kensuke Hayasaka, head of the parks and green spaces division at Hirosaki City. "Not only from the city, but from across Japan and overseas; a fair number from south-east Asia and from Europe and North America."

To preserve the historic structure, a technique known as *hikiya* – where buildings are put on rollers and moved rather than dismantled – was used. In 2015, the city called for people to participate in its first citizen-driven *hikiya*.

"Because the keep is a nationally designated important cultural property, we didn't take it apart," Hayasaka said. "We're using *hikiya*, a building-relocation method that has existed in Japan since ancient times."

The wall was completed in December 2024, with all 2,185 stones restacked in their original positions.

This year officials again asked for the public's help to pull the keep back to its original position.

Motoharu Nakata, 61, who travelled from Hiroshima on the other side of Japan, said: "I pulled it 11 years ago too. It's very moving to be able to participate again.

There's absolutely no other opportunity to pull a castle – it was fantastic," Nakata told newspaper Sankei Shimbun.

Pulling the keep by hand will continue until the end of August, with about 4,100 people scheduled to move it a total of 5m. The remaining 73m will be carried out using machinery by the end of the year.

The Hirosaki Castle keep is one of 12 such structures left in Japan, and the only one in the northeastern Tohoku region. Seat of the Tsugaru clan, the castle was completed in 1611 but the original keep burned down after a lightning strike ignited a gunpowder store in 1627.

The castle keep is not expected to reopen to the public until 2033.

Russian venue says Kanye West shows will not take place there

Laura Snapes

The St Petersburg stadium that was to host two concerts by Ye has said the shows will not take place at the venue, although the promoter has stressed they have not been cancelled.

Gazprom Arena had previously posted on social media saying that "the most influential musical artist of our time" would perform there on 10 and 11 October – making the rapper formerly known as Kanye West the biggest western act to play in Russia since the start of the Ukraine war. "This is no joke!" the post stated. The event sold out immediately.

The UK, Italy, Poland, France and other countries have blocked or sought to block concerts by Ye because of public safety concerns arising from his prior antisemitic outbursts and expressions of sympathy for nazism. In January, Ye issued an apology for his behaviour and discussed his mental health struggles. "I am not a Nazi or an antisemite," he wrote. "I love Jewish people."

The Russian venue released a statement distancing itself from the concerts. "In light of the numerous inquiries received by Gazprom Arena regarding the organisation of a Kanye West concert, we hereby officially state: Gazprom Arena was not, and is not, the organiser of this event.

◀ *Ye, formerly known as Kanye West, has apologised for past antisemitic remarks and said: 'I am not a Nazi'*

"That role was handled by the Moscow-based concert agency Say Agency. Gazprom Arena has not signed any contracts to lease the stadium for this event. No such contract exists. Consequently, the concert cannot take place at our venue."

On Telegram, Say Agency said it was surprised by the announcement, but that "as of now, the Ye concert has not been cancelled". The agency said it announced the concerts after Gazprom Arena approved an "official letter", but the rental contract had not yet been signed.

The politician Nikolay Novichkov called for Ye to be investigated for praising Hitler and said the concerts should be cancelled unless he publicly declared "moral support for Russia and the special military operation".

CIA chief makes unannounced Moscow trip, US media reports

Peter Beaumont

The CIA director, John Ratcliffe, has made an unannounced visit to Moscow, US media reported, after flight data showed an American military aircraft flew to the Russian capital, where a US diplomatic motorcade was later spotted.

CBS News quoted sources familiar with the situation yesterday as confirming Ratcliffe's trip, saying it was his first known visit to Russia as the CIA chief. Axios separately confirmed the visit, quoting a US official.

The Financial Times reported that the Trump administration had asked Kyiv to pause its long-range strikes on major Russian cities during the course of the visit.

There was no immediate comment from the CIA or the White House.

Data from Flightradar24 showed a US military C-17 travelling from the US to Latvia and then on to Moscow. The tracker showed that the flight originated from Joint Base Andrews in Maryland.

Ratcliffe's reported visit comes as US-brokered talks aimed at ending Russia's invasion of Ukraine have stalled. However, earlier this month Moscow freed a former US marine detained since 2022, amid concerns about his health.

The reason for the visit is unclear but the CIA has mediated in recent US-Russia detainee exchanges.

Some speculation has focused on the war in Iran, which remains a bone of contention between Moscow and Washington.

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02 DEC **EDINBURGH** USHER HALL	12 DEC **YORK** BARBICAN
02 DEC **LONDON** EVENTIM APOLLO	14 DEC **BIRMINGHAM** SYMPHONY HALL
04 DEC **BATH** THE FORUM	15 DEC **MANCHESTER** BRIDGEWATER HALL
05 DEC **LIVERPOOL** PHILHARMONIC HALL	20 DEC **POOLE** LIGHTHOUSE
06 DEC **SWANSEA** BUILDING SOCIETY ARENA	21 DEC **BRIGHTON** BRIGHTON CENTRE
10 DEC **NOTTINGHAM** ROYAL CONCERT HALL	22 DEC **PORTSMOUTH** GUILDHALL

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FTSE 100	All share	Dow Indl	Nikkei 225	£/€	£/$
+31.84	+18.87	+108.44	+328.34	1.1683	1.3634
10886.16	5869.29	53525.60	65856.43	-0.0004	-0.0001

SOURCE: ICE www.ice.com/data

Business

Lottery boss faces questions over ties to gambling industry

Rob Davies

The national lottery is facing questions over its new boss's record in the gambling industry, including a lucrative role in the 24-hour slot machine sector singled out by the prime minister as a blight on British high streets.

Allwyn UK, which holds a licence to run the lottery until 2034, said last week it had appointed William Hill's former UK and Ireland boss Phil Walker as its interim chief executive.

While Walker may not get the job on a permanent basis, MPs have written to the Gambling Commission, the industry regulator, about his selection as a steward of the UK's most high-profile gambling brand.

In a letter seen by the Guardian, the Labour MP Dawn Butler and Conservative MP Iain Duncan Smith told the regulator they were "deeply concerned" by the appointment.

They cited a personal sanction that the regulator imposed on Walker in 2024 over "widespread and alarming" failures to enforce money-laundering and terrorist financing controls at William Hill, which was fined a record £19.2m the previous year.

They also raised concerns about a boardroom role he holds with Game Nation, the UK's third largest chain of adult gaming centres (AGCs).

AGCs are high street gambling venues that are often referred to as "slot farms" owing to their high concentration of slot machines, and are open 24 hours a day in the majority of cases.

Last year, upon taking a job with City Gaming Limited, which owns Game Nation, Walker said he was excited to "develop and grow [the company] over the coming years".

That view appears to put the industry veteran at odds with the government, just as he prepares to take the reins of the lottery, frequently described as the UK's largest public sector contract, worth £6.5bn in revenue over 10 years.

While still mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham hit out at AGCs, accusing the sector of "targeting some of the most vulnerable in our communities".

This month, he announced plans to tighten up the permissive licensing regime that has allowed the sector to achieve the growth that Walker has previously advocated.

Butler, who was instrumental in Burnham's decision to crack down on AGCs, has written to the Gambling Commission raising concerns.

In a letter co-signed by Duncan Smith she said the pair were seeking clarity on whether Walker's work for City Gaming was "compatible" with the decision to select him to run the lottery.

With regard to his tenure at William Hill, they asked the regulator to "explain what consideration, if any, was given to this history when assessing his suitability for his present position".

A Gambling Commission spokesperson said: "We would not publicly comment on an operator's personnel decisions."

Yesterday, Game Nation said Walker would "step back" from his role with the company, with effect from 1 September, for the duration of his interim contract with the national lottery.

A spokesperson for Allwyn said: "As we navigate an increasingly competitive environment, Phil Walker brings valuable operational, digital and marketing experience alongside a significant understanding of our operating landscape.

"His appointment will help deliver the next stage of growth and innovation of the national lottery, and we look forward to welcoming Phil to the role of interim CEO."

Allwyn, which is ultimately owned by the Czech billionaire Karel Komárek, has previously highlighted that Walker did not lose his personal licence from the Gambling Commission over the sanction imposed while at William Hill, indicating that the regulator believes him fit and proper to run a business in the sector.

The Guardian has approached the government for comment.

Volkswagen CEO booed by workers as he outlines plan for job losses

Kate Connolly
Berlin

Volkswagen's chief executive was met with boos and whistles at the company's headquarters yesterday after telling workers that drastic restructuring at the beleaguered manufacturer was vital for its future.

As Oliver Blume urged more than 10,000 workers to "pull together", they held up banners and shouted slogans including "our jobs are not your balance sheet adjustments".

"Our plan for the future is the largest transformation programme in our company's history. To make this happen, everyone needs to pull together now," Blume said.

The chief executive was in Wolfsburg, Lower Saxony, speaking for the first time since details were made public about plans for mass job losses and possible factory closures.

Blume said one of the goals was to guarantee a future for all plants at Europe's largest carmaker. "Our aim is to create viable prospects for all locations within the next six to 12 months," he said.

The plans have yet to be approved by VW group's powerful supervisory board, which represents the labour force, as well as the state of Lower Saxony and shareholders.

▲ *Volkswagen cars held in a delivery tower at the group's headquarters in Wolfsburg, northern Germany*
PHOTOGRAPH: KRISZTIAN BOCSI/GETTY IMAGES

The meeting, widely described by attenders as heated, was not open to the media. But eyewitnesses reported that Blume had said half of the expected job cuts – often cited at about 50,000 – would take place in Germany. He is reported to have told them: "From today's perspective, roughly half of the necessary adjustments are in Germany, the other half internationally – across a total of approximately 170 companies."

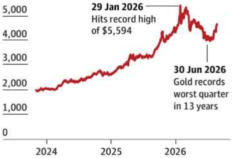
Blume stressed that the worldwide job cuts plan was not a target, but a "theoretical calculation" and based on VW's current costs, which he said were "about 30% above the average of comparable companies".

He said the executive board stood "fully behind the future plan".

Instead of forced job cuts, Blume said management wanted to rely on voluntary personnel instruments as much as possible, including phased retirement, mutual agreements and "a restrictive hiring policy". He described factory closures as the "last and most costly resort".

VW's labour leader, Daniela Cavallo, said opposition to closures was strong and accused Blume of being vague about the plans. "It's impossible to work with a CEO who doesn't tell his people what's going on," she said. VW has found itself under increasing pressure due to Chinese competition in Europe, falling sales in China and hefty US tariffs. Before that, it struggled with falling profits and overproduction in Europe.

Gold prices have risen in August
Spot price, $ a troy ounce



Source: LSEG

Gold prices hit three-month high amid fears over Iran war

Joanna Partridge
Graeme Wearden

Gold prices hit their highest level in more than three months yesterday as continued conflict in the Middle East and jitters in the bond markets fuelled the latest rally in the precious metal.

Gold is viewed as a safe haven by investors and its price tends to rise at times of uncertainty. It has risen by about 15% so far during August, reaching $4,651 (£3,410) an ounce during Asian trading hours, before falling back slightly. This put gold on track for its best monthly performance in almost 30 years.

The price of gold began to rise in early August amid optimism that the US and Iran were closer to restoring a ceasefire. While this did not happen, the price of gold has continued to climb.

The latest rises came as investors awaited US inflation data and a speech from the new US Federal Reserve chair, Kevin Warsh, amid anxiety in government bond markets over Donald Trump's tax and spending plans.

The price of bitcoin rose above $80,000 (£58,680) yesterday, taking the cryptocurrency to a three-month high, which analysts attributed to a weakening US dollar.

The dollar has come under pressure since the US Treasury secretary, Scott Bessent, began intervening in the financial markets to push down borrowing costs.

Writing in the Wall Street Journal, the billionaire investor Stanley Druckenmiller said the decision to increase the US Treasury's purchases of long-dated bonds was a mistake.

"Governments defending prices against fundamentals always lose. The only variable is how much they spend before conceding," he said.

The biggest gold rally since the 1970s occurred last year after Trump announced tariffs on imported goods, prompting fears of disruption to global trade.

Ageing population and extreme heat pile pressure on insurers

Kalyeena Makortoff
Banking correspondent

Europe's intense heatwaves could hit insurers' earnings as companies face a rise in claims linked to heat-related deaths and worsening health conditions, the rating agency S&P has said.

While a long summer of extreme heat will have increased drought and wildfire-related claims, the rating agency said there would also be fallout for life and health insurers, and for the reinsurers who provide protection to insurance companies. That could mean higher premiums as insurers faced increased payouts.

The health effects of high temperatures fall disproportionately on older people. This has meant a wave of claims over heat-related deaths and increased demand for private medical services at a time when rising temperatures have not yet been fully reflected in original contracts.

Between 2004 and 2024, the share of people aged 65 and over in the EU rose from 16.4% to 21.6%; those aged 80 and over rose from 3.8% to 6.1%.

About 9,000 of the 10,650 excess deaths during the 22-28 June heatwave were among those 65 and over.

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Business view

Nils Pratley

Labour's energy bills crisis is getting worse. Political honesty over future costs is essential

Another Ofgem energy price cap day, another increase in bills. Miatta Fahnbulleh, the new energy secretary, can blame the usual culprit today - the fossil fuel price "rollercoaster", given a shove this time by Donald Trump's Middle East misadventure. Higher gas prices will indeed be the main quarter-on-quarter reason why bills stand at a three-year high on a unit basis.

But even when the gas rollercoaster dips downwards, the energy industry's medium-term projections suggest bills will not fall meaningfully. Look at the forecast yesterday from EDF, one of the big retail suppliers, assuming "some moderation" in wholesale prices. Top line: "Bills still look stubbornly high at the end of the decade." Versus its assumed £1,721 for the price cap for the last three months of 2026, the company projects £1,786 in 2030.

The number would be £90 lower if the government extends VAT relief on electricity and continues to take a portion of older green levies into general taxation. Either way, the former energy secretary Ed Miliband's naive, or cynical, "£300 off bills by 2030" promise looks non-operative at this point.

EDF can be reasonably confident in its figures because, whatever happens with wholesale prices, more of the bill now comprises easier-to-predict "non-commodity costs". They cover everything from charges for running and upgrading the gas and electricity grids, price contracts for wind and solar generators, carbon taxes, the cost of the warm home discount for vulnerable households and more.

EDF accompanied its projection with an appeal for greater transparency on future costs. Absolutely right: it is astonishing that Ofgem does not make medium-term forecasts to give customers a rough idea of what to expect. The excuse may be that absolute precision is impossible, but the stance makes a supposedly independent regulator appear politically captured. Ofgem looks afraid to give the awkward message that the necessary energy transition is expensive in the short and medium terms - and probably getting more expensive.

Openness would allow everybody to see where the pressures are coming from. The current suspect is the transmission network and the £70bn programme to relieve constraints and hook up new generation. EDF's account of rising costs and deployment delays chimes with what the rest of the industry is saying.

Transparency would help in other ways. First, it would underline how towering bad debts in the system could become colossal. What's the political plan? A social discount scheme is now urgent.

Second, if electrification is the goal, tell businesses and households what's coming on electricity prices so they can price up heat pumps and electric vehicles. The pace of adoption of the former should embarrass the government: 52,000 retrofit heatpumps were installed last year versus 1m-plus gas boilers. "Ofgem should commit to publishing a first independent outlook for energy bills before the end of this year," recommends EDF. The regulator's bone-headedness is inexplicable - unless it is being leant on.

Political dangers for Labour are mounting. The Conservatives, endorsing a "cheap power" report from the centre-right thinktank Onward, last week laid out an alternative post-2030 script that imagines more nuclear (beyond Labour's ambitions) and a bigger role for gas in generation while keeping the installed renewables.

Many energy analysts have criticised the cost assumptions behind the claim that such a set-up would save consumers £320bn by 2050. But Claire Coutinho, the shadow energy secretary, was still right to complain that the government never published a "full system cost" analysis - one that takes full account of the back-up, balancing and extra grid costs created by using more weather-dependent generation. Again, there is a need for straight transition accounting: you can't just count the gains from using less gas.

Fahnbulleh is in a tight spot. In a less fiscally constrained world, the chancellor would shift more transition costs into general taxation, as many other European countries do. If John Healey can't dig deep, her argument can no longer be that a clean power system is straightforwardly "cheap" for consumers, but that it is cheaper than the alternatives eventually.

She will also have to tell those Labour backbenchers calling for a recommitment to the 95% clean power target by 2030 that it ain't happening. Building delays mean the outcome will be more like 80%-85%. The priority is to keep costs under control. But the political challenges would be made easier with greater transparency.

▼ *George Town, the financial hub of the Caymans, where corporate transparency is hard to come by*

PHOTOGRAPH: ERIC LAUDONIEN/ALAMY

‘A flagrant breach’ Offshore tax havens thwarting the UK’s transparency push

Rob Davies

Since Britain’s offshore jurisdictions caved in to pressure from Westminster to embrace corporate transparency, finding out who owns a company in one of these secretive island havens is, in theory at least, a piece of cake.

Take the Cayman Islands. All you have to do is show that you have a “legitimate interest” in the data by proving that you are a researcher, journalist, member of a civil society group or a business person considering a transaction with the subject of your inquiry. Next, you must explain how the information will be used for “preventing, detecting, investigating, combating or prosecution money laundering or its predicate offences or terrorist financing”.

Then, there is a fee of at least $75 (£55) for each application. You’ll need to set up an international wire transfer though, rather than a typical online payment. Now, fill out a lengthy form outlining exactly what information you’re after, cross your fingers and wait.

Even when the form has been submitted, the subject of the inquiry can apply for a three-year “protection from disclosure” (at a cost of $1,000) to stop the information being sent on, on the basis that corporate transparency could expose them to harm.

These applications are refused more often than not, a Cayman Islands spokesperson said, but justifications for exemption appear to be drawn quite widely.

Reasons could include revealing any connections to “activity such as testing products on animals, which might lead to them being targeted by activists,” according to guidelines written by the Cayman Islands government.

Transparency campaigners believe aspects of the system in the British Virgin Islands (BVI) are even worse. There, officials will inform the subject of any inquiry - perhaps a narco-trafficker - of the name of any organisation asking the inconvenient questions, though not the names of individuals.

Don’t expect a quick outcome either. “Three months ago we asked whether a sanctioned Russian oligarch still owns a company holding millions worth of UK property,” said Steve Goodrich, the head of research and investigations at the anti-corruption campaign group Transparency International. “We still haven’t had a reply.”

Margaret Hodge, the anti-corruption campaigner, said the sclerotic and unpredictable nature of these corporate registries “makes a mockery of their purpose”.

Legitimate interest access registers of beneficial ownership (or Liarbos for fans of ironic acronyms) have come about after a seven-year campaign by the UK government to bring overseas territories - and crown dependencies such as Jersey and Guernsey - to heel.

The campaign has gathered steam amid mounting examples of how Britain’s offshore havens had been used to launder money, avoid taxes or otherwise flout laws or other norms, such as the financial rules governing football.

Cayman Islands entities played a central role in the 1MDB scandal, in which the US justice department believes more than $4.5bn was stolen through the Malaysian state fund.

The Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich secretly funded Chelsea FC with cash funnelled through companies in the BVI, the Guardian revealed last year.

The BVI was the single most-used jurisdiction in the now infamous Pandora papers leak which exposed the secret offshore affairs of billionaires, politicians, celebrities and business leaders.

By this year, after several missed deadlines, all of the overseas territories had responded to the drive to introduce Liarbos.

But, according to Stephen Abbott Pugh of Open Ownership, the registers are “too costly, too complicated and [it] takes too long to access this crucial information. So it remains locked away in most cases out of the reach of users with a legitimate interest in accessing it.”

A spokesperson for the Caymans said only 25 applications for information had been received in 19 months, citing this as evidence of lack of demand. The spokesperson rejected criticism that the register was hard to use or costly, and defended the islands’ reputation.

> *‘With a new government in place under Andy Burnham, I hope we will be able to review our approach’*
>
> **Margaret Hodge**
> *Anti-corruption champion*

“In spite of the public perception created by Hollywood fiction, misguided NGOs, and the politicians whom they have influence over, no credible evidence has ever been presented that Cayman has a problem with illicit finance,” they said.

The new registers, according to the UK government’s own rhetoric, are only supposed to be an “interim step” towards fully public corporate registers accessible to all.

Disagreement over the pace of progress towards greater transparency has fuelled simmering tensions between London and offshore outposts.

Last year, Lady Hodge - the government’s “anti-corruption champion” - was dispatched to the BVI on what was officially called a fact-finding mission but looked more like a shot across the bows.

Criticism of the BVI by two other leading anti-corruption voices in Westminster - Phil Brickell MP and Joe Powell MP - led to one BVI media outlet printing a cartoon of the duo. Wearing thick boots, they were depicted kicking lumps out of Riley Right - a cartoon parakeet in a suit who serves as the islands’ corporate transparency mascot.

“The only way to shine a light on the dirty money flowing through British overseas territories like the BVI is to have full transparency over who owns the companies registered there,” said Powell.

“It’s completely unacceptable that following the money is still so hard, and it is a flagrant breach of their agreement with the British government.”

Brickell said the “eyes of the world” will be on the UK government when it hosts a summit on countering illicit finance later this year. “Failure to get our own house in order by then would be an acute embarrassment,” he said.

Hodge isn’t backing off either. Earlier this year, she indicated that Westminster could force crown dependencies to improve transparency.

Hodge fears that crown dependencies are now “hiding” behind a prolonged EU row over how corporate registers in the 27-nation bloc should look.

She doesn’t want to wait to see how that process plays out. “With a new government in place under Andy Burnham, I would hope we will be able to review our approach and be effective,” she said.

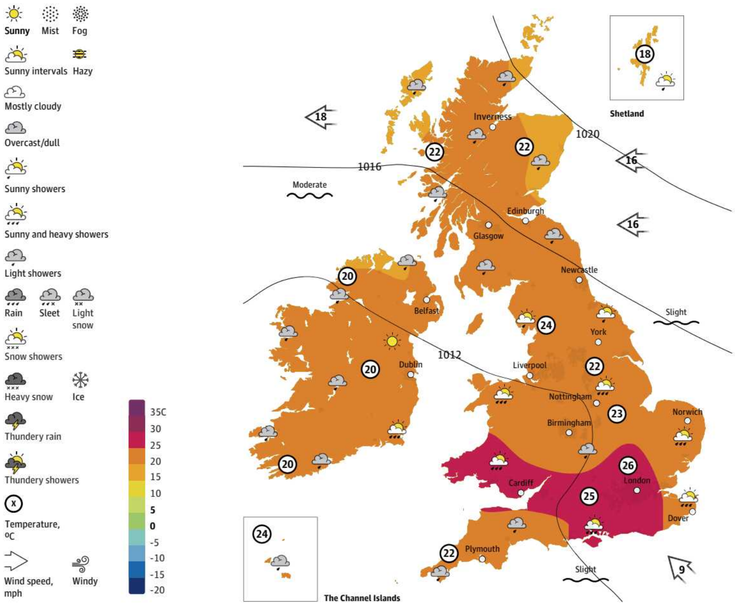
Spokespeople for the Cayman Islands and the BVI rejected the suggestion that public access to corporate ownership registers were an accepted international standard and said tax and criminal authorities already had full access.

A BVI spokesperson said: “We are proud of our legitimate interest access regime which has significantly strengthened the accuracy, security and accessibility of beneficial ownership data.

“The regime offers greater transparency alongside appropriate protections for individual privacy, while remaining aligned with international standards, including the EU’s sixth anti-money laundering directive.”

Weather
Wednesday 26 August 2026

UK and Ireland Noon today


Sunny
Mist
Fog
Sunny intervals
Hazy
Mostly cloudy
Overcast/dull
Sunny showers
Sunny and heavy showers
Light showers
Rain
Sleet
Light snow
Snow showers
Heavy snow
Ice
Thundery rain
Thundery showers
X
Temperature, ºC
Wind speed, mph
Windy
35C
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
-5
-10
-15
-20
Shetland
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Inverness
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22
1020
16
1016
18
Moderate
Edinburgh
Glasgow
16
Newcastle
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Belfast
Slight
24
York
1012
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Dublin
Liverpool
22
Nottingham
23
Norwich
Birmingham
20
26
London
Cardiff
25
Dover
24
22
Plymouth
Slight
9
The Channel Islands

Forecast

Low 16 High 21
Tomorrow

Low 14 High 20
Friday

Carbon count

Daily atmospheric CO₂ readings from Mauna Loa, Hawaii (ppm):

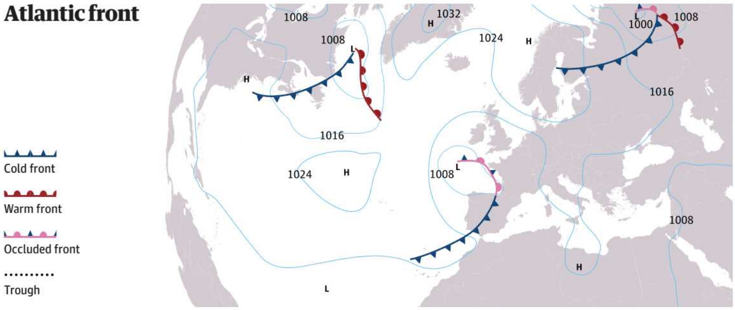
Latest	
24 Aug 2026	426.87
Weekly average	
16 Aug 2026	426.98
25 Aug 2025	425.60
25 Aug 2016	402.11
Pre-industrial base	*280*
Safe level	*350*

Source: NOAA-ESRL

Around the UK

	Lows and highs	Precipitation	Air pollution
London	18 26	85%	Low
Manchester	16 23	90%	Low
Edinburgh	14 20	55%	Low
Belfast	15 20	55%	Low
Birmingham	16 23	85%	Low
Brighton	17 21	85%	Low
Bristol	16 25	85%	Moderate
Cardiff	16 25	85%	Moderate
Newcastle	14 21	55%	Low
Penzance	17 21	85%	Low

Atlantic front


Cold front
Warm front
Occluded front
Trough
1008
1032
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High tides

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Aberdeen	**0003**	3.8m	**1239**	3.8m
Avonmouth	**0552**	11.2m	**1814**	11.9m
Barrow	**1027**	8.0m	**2239**	8.6m
Belfast	**1014**	3.1m	**2224**	3.3m
Cobh	**0413**	3.6m	**1635**	3.8m
Cromer	**0518**	4.6m	**1756**	4.4m
Dover	**1004**	6.1m	**2222**	6.1m
Dublin	**1042**	3.6m	**2241**	3.9m
Galway	**0418**	4.3m	**1624**	4.7m
Greenock	**1130**	2.9m	**2347**	3.3m
Harwich	**1039**	3.7m	**2307**	3.8m
Holyhead	**0930**	4.9m	**2133**	5.3m
Hull	**0452**	6.7m	**1733**	6.5m
Leith	**0121**	4.9m	**1352**	5.0m
Liverpool	**1012**	8.3m	**2219**	8.8m
London Bridge	**0030**	6.3m	**1250**	6.4m
Lossiemouth	**1104**	3.6m	**2303**	3.8m
Milford Haven	**0508**	6.0m	**1723**	6.5m
Newquay	**0401**	5.9m	**1615**	6.3m
North Shields	**0211**	4.5m	**1444**	4.5m
Oban	**0451**	3.3m	**1707**	3.7m
Penzance	**0335**	4.7m	**1549**	5.1m
Plymouth	**0427**	4.7m	**1642**	5.1m
Portsmouth	**1033**	4.3m	**2238**	4.3m
Southport	**0940**	8.0m	**2147**	8.5m
Stornoway	**0605**	4.1m	**1805**	4.5m
Portland	**0535**	1.6m	**1748**	1.9m
Whitby	**0244**	5.0m	**1516**	5.0m
Wick	**1029**	3.0m	**2228**	3.2m
Workington	**1036**	7.2m	**2246**	7.7m

Sun & Moon

Sun rises	0603
Sun sets	1959
Moon rises	1929
Moon sets	0341
Full Moon	28 Aug

Forecasts and graphics provided by **AccuWeather** ©2026

Lighting up

Belfast	2032 to 0623
Birm'ham	2009 to 0610
Brighton	1959 to 0606
Bristol	2010 to 0616
Carlisle	2019 to 0608
Cork	2034 to 0638
Dublin	2029 to 0626
Glasgow	2027 to 0613
Harlech	2019 to 0618
Inverness	2030 to 0607
London	1959 to 0604
M'chester	2013 to 0610
Newcastle	2014 to 0604
Norwich	1957 to 0557
Penzance	2019 to 0629

Terrawatch

A booming demand for concrete has led to sand and gravel being extracted from riverbeds faster than nature can replenish them. A study in Reviews of Geophysics shows sand and gravel demand has more than doubled in the past 20 years, with overextraction leading to weaker riverbanks, lower groundwater levels, coastal salt intrusion and poorer water quality.

In 2024, global city-building and infrastructure projects turned 28bn tonnes of sand and gravel into concrete. Researchers reviewed data on their extraction going back to 1974. They show that since 2000 demand has more than doubled, with 80% of current demand coming from Asia - China and India in particular - and much of the material was being extracted from rivers across Asia and Africa. Data is scarce but where it does exist, it showed that extraction was often many times greater than natural sediment replacement.

The researchers suggest satellite imaging can be used to better manage the extraction. Demand can be reduced by using materials more efficiently, plus developing alternatives such as processed construction waste, recycled glass and treated bottom ash from waste incineration. **Kate Ravilious**

Around the world

Algiers	35	Lisbon	23
Ams'dam	25	Madrid	28
Athens	35	Malaga	33
Auckland	17	Melb'rne	15
B Aires	17	Mexico C	25
Bangkok	33	Miami	32
Barcelona	29	Milan	30
Basra	48	Mombasa	30
Beijing	25	Moscow	16
Berlin	23	Mumbai	31
Bermuda	30	N Orleans	34
Brussels	25	Nairobi	26
Budapest	28	New Delhi	34
C'hagen	21	New York	26
Cairo	37	Oslo	25
Cape Town	25	Paris	28
Chicago	28	Perth	18
Corfu	35	Prague	20
Dakar	31	Reykjavik	11
Dhaka	32	Rio de J	23
Dublin	20	Rome	32
Florence	33	Shanghai	33
Gibraltar	28	Singapore	31
H Kong	31	Stockh'm	21
Harare	27	Strasb'g	27
Helsinki	21	Sydney	18
Istanbul	30	Tel Aviv	33
Jo'burg	25	Tenerife	29
K Lumpur	32	Tokyo	34
K'mandu	28	Toronto	25
Kabul	32	Vancouv'r	22
Kingston	34	Vienna	26
Kolkata	32	Warsaw	22
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Cricket

The Secret Coach on the darker side of a cricketer's life

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Football

'It's the university of football': Xavi on Netherlands job

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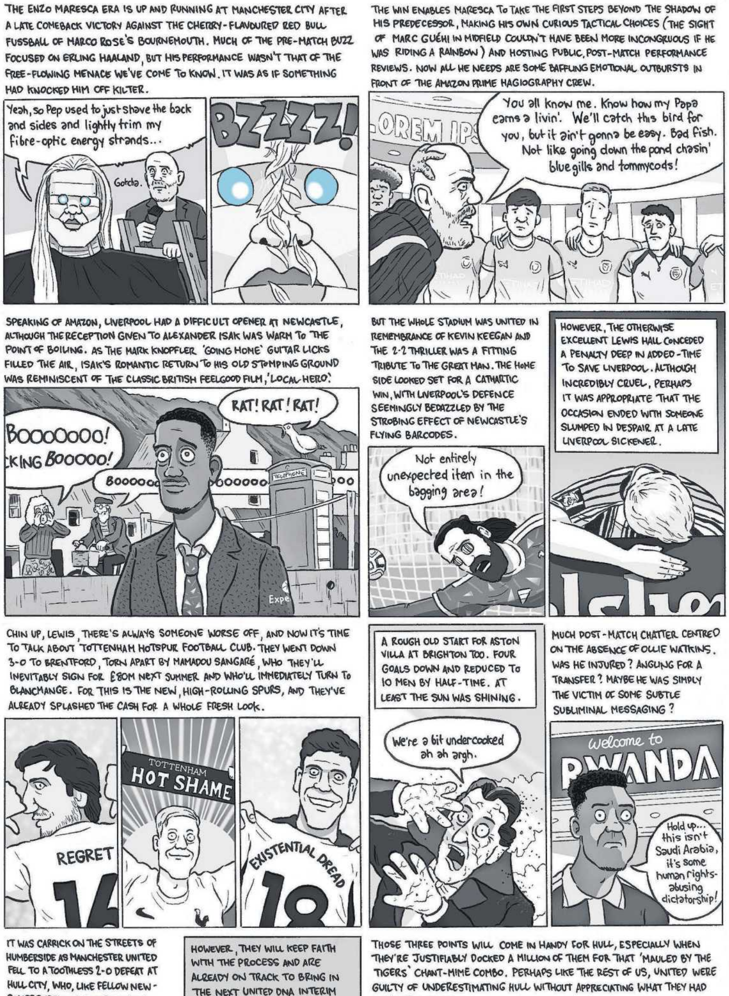
Sport

David Squires on … boos, barcodes and buzzcuts as the Premier League returns


THE ENZO MARESCA ERA IS UP AND RUNNING AT MANCHESTER CITY AFTER A LATE COMEBACK VICTORY AGAINST THE CHERRY-FLAVOURED RED BULL FUSSBALL OF MARCO ROSE'S BOURNEMOUTH. MUCH OF THE PRE-MATCH BUZZ FOCUSED ON ERLING HAALAND, BUT HIS PERFORMANCE WASN'T THAT OF THE FREE-FLOWING MENACE WE'VE COME TO KNOW. IT WAS AS IF SOMETHING HAD KNOCKED HIM OFF KILTER.
Yeah, so Pep used to just shave the back and sides and lightly trim my fibre-optic energy strands...
Gotcha.
BZZZZ!
THE WIN ENABLES MARESCA TO TAKE THE FIRST STEPS BEYOND THE SHADOW OF HIS PREDECESSOR, MAKING HIS OWN CURIOUS TACTICAL CHOICES (THE SIGHT OF MARC GUÉHI IN MIDFIELD COULDN'T HAVE BEEN MORE INCONGRUOUS IF HE WAS RIDING A RAINBOW) AND HOSTING PUBLIC, POST-MATCH PERFORMANCE REVIEWS. NOW ALL HE NEEDS ARE SOME BAFFLING EMOTIONAL OUTBURSTS IN FRONT OF THE AMAZON PRIME HAGIOGRAPHY CREW.
LOREM IPS
You all know me. Know how my Papa earns a livin'. We'll catch this bird for you, but it ain't gonna be easy. Bad fish. Not like going down the pond chasin' blue gills and tommycods!
SPEAKING OF AMAZON, LIVERPOOL HAD A DIFFICULT OPENER AT NEWCASTLE, ALTHOUGH THE RECEPTION GIVEN TO ALEXANDER ISAK WAS WARM TO THE POINT OF BOILING. AS THE MARK KNOPFLER 'GOING HOME' GUITAR LICKS FILLED THE AIR, ISAK'S ROMANTIC RETURN TO HIS OLD STOMPING GROUND WAS REMINISCENT OF THE CLASSIC BRITISH FEELGOOD FILM, 'LOCAL HERO'.
RAT! RAT! RAT!
BOOOOOOO!
KING BOOOOO!
BOOOOO
OOOOOOO
OOO
TELEPHONE
Expe
BUT THE WHOLE STADIUM WAS UNITED IN REMEMBRANCE OF KEVIN KEEGAN AND THE 2-2 THRILLER WAS A FITTING TRIBUTE TO THE GREAT MAN. THE HOME SIDE LOOKED SET FOR A CATHARTIC WIN, WITH LIVERPOOL'S DEFENCE SEEMINGLY BEDAZZLED BY THE STROBING EFFECT OF NEWCASTLE'S FLYING BARCODES.
Not entirely unexpected item in the bagging area!
HOWEVER, THE OTHERWISE EXCELLENT LEWIS HALL CONCEDED A PENALTY DEEP IN ADDED-TIME TO SAVE LIVERPOOL. ALTHOUGH INCREDIBLY CRUEL, PERHAPS IT WAS APPROPRIATE THAT THE OCCASION ENDED WITH SOMEONE SLUMPED IN DESPAIR AT A LATE LIVERPOOL SICKENER.
CHIN UP, LEWIS, THERE'S ALWAYS SOMEONE WORSE OFF, AND NOW IT'S TIME TO TALK ABOUT TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR FOOTBALL CLUB. THEY WENT DOWN 3-0 TO BRENTFORD, TORN APART BY MAMADOU SANGARÉ, WHO THEY'LL INEVITABLY SIGN FOR £80M NEXT SUMMER AND WHO'LL IMMEDIATELY TURN TO BLANCMANGE. FOR THIS IS THE NEW, HIGH-ROLLING SPURS, AND THEY'VE ALREADY SPLASHED THE CASH FOR A WHOLE FRESH LOOK.
REGRET
16
TOTTENHAM
HOT SHAME
EXISTENTIAL DREAD
18
A ROUGH OLD START FOR ASTON VILLA AT BRIGHTON TOO. FOUR GOALS DOWN AND REDUCED TO 10 MEN BY HALF-TIME. AT LEAST THE SUN WAS SHINING.
We're a bit undercooked ah ah argh.
MUCH POST-MATCH CHATTER CENTRED ON THE ABSENCE OF OLLIE WATKINS. WAS HE INJURED? ANGLING FOR A TRANSFER? MAYBE HE WAS SIMPLY THE VICTIM OF SOME SUBTLE SUBLIMINAL MESSAGING?
Welcome to RWANDA
Hold up... this isn't Saudi Arabia, it's some human rights-abusing dictatorship!
IT WAS CARRICK ON THE STREETS OF HUMBERSIDE AS MANCHESTER UNITED FELL TO A TOOTHLESS 2-0 DEFEAT AT HULL CITY, WHO, LIKE FELLOW NEWCOMERS IPSWICH ~~AND COVENTRY~~ ENJOYED A DREAM START. FOR UNITED, IT BROUGHT BACK MEMORIES OF SOME OF THEIR TOUGHEST AWAY DAYS...
WELCOME TO HULL
HOWEVER, THEY WILL KEEP FAITH WITH THE PROCESS AND ARE ALREADY ON TRACK TO BRING IN THE NEXT UNITED DNA INTERIM VIBES MAN TO LIFT THE LATE AUTUMN GLOOM.
You know what he's got? His own blazer.
Yeah.
THOSE THREE POINTS WILL COME IN HANDY FOR HULL, ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY'RE JUSTIFIABLY DOCKED A MILLION OF THEM FOR THAT 'MAULED BY THE TIGERS' CHANT-MIME COMBO. PERHAPS LIKE THE REST OF US, UNITED WERE GUILTY OF UNDERESTIMATING HULL WITHOUT APPRECIATING WHAT THEY HAD IN THEIR LOCKER.
Bloody hell, their big lad's having a field day out there. We might be in trouble here.
Trouble, yeah.
I mean the movement alone, Steve!

David Squires archive **Peruse our resident cartoonist's previous work at** *theguardian.com/profile/david-squires*

Boxing

Itauma rebuffs Hrgovic taunt before world title showdown

Donald McRae

Moses Itauma has hit back at Filip Hrgovic's taunt that he is a "delusional kid" and admitted his Croatian rival is starting to annoy him as the two men prepare to fight for the IBF world heavyweight title on Saturday night at the O2 Arena in London.

"I tell myself there's nothing that this Hrgovic guy can do to get in my head but he's starting to wind me up," Itauma said yesterday. "In an interview earlier, apparently he said I wake up and I just hug trees. He's really starting to annoy me.

"If somebody's trying to get one up on you, or trying to get in your head, it's because they're not confident in themselves. Obviously Hrgovic is a talker. Before fights, he's always said certain things. It's just because English ain't his first language that people don't pay attention."

If Itauma beats Hrgovic, as expected, he will become the second-youngest world heavyweight champion in history. Only Mike Tyson won the title at a younger age and Hrgovic said of the 21-year-old Itauma: "He's a kid. He's inexperienced. So, for him, it would be best to lose this fight because it's going to ruin him, winning the world title. He's already delusional. And it can ruin someone who's not ready for that kind of fame, that kind of money.

"It can ruin your soul, it can make you lose yourself and we've seen a lot of superstars who have lost themselves. They're just lost in that crazy world of fame and money. He's not ready for that. I think, for him, it would be best to lose this fight, to save his soul. Because what does it mean to achieve everything if you lose your soul and you lose yourself?"

Itauma conceded there is a semblance of truth in Hrgovic's words: "Although it's been annoying me, I hear that because I know the level of success I've achieved and how I'm coping. I've always said I never wanted to be at Anthony Joshua or Tyson Fury level because I know how annoyed I get trying to be a normal person. I can't imagine being at a level of Tyson Fury or Anthony Joshua. But, at the same time, if I'm going down this path, I don't have a choice."

Asked if Hrgovic has a point that winning a world title at such a young age would be bad for his "soul", Itauma replied: "I wouldn't say he has a point but if I win this fight it might not be good for my soul. I can hear that. But that's not the reason why I'm just gonna go in there and not win – for the sake of my soul. That's not a good idea."

Pressed to explain why Itauma is "delusional", Hrgovic said: "He went from youth level to professional, had a few fights and became a star. Everyone is clapping him on his back – [saying] you're the best, you're the next Muhammad Ali, you're the new Mike Tyson. He's just not. I'm grateful for all the hard things I went through. It makes you a different person."

The 34-year-old Hrgovic, who has lost just once in a professional career stretching across nine years, said: "I'm in a much different position because of that experience. I'm like a rock. Nothing can move me. I don't care about fame. I don't care about money. But we'll see on Saturday."

▲ *Moses Itauma puts his unbeaten record on the line on Saturday*

Cycling *Vuelta a España*

Pogacar powers to stage four win

Tadej Pogacar arrived in red, lit the fuse on the climbs and turned stage four of the Vuelta a España into a private exhibition, powering away with almost 50 kilometres remaining to win alone in Andorra la Vella.

The Slovenian, bidding to complete his Grand Tour collection by claiming the Vuelta for the first time, attacked on the road to the second climb and reduced a high-altitude battle into a one-man procession.

Pogacar began the final ascent with a lead of 3min 12sec and cruised over the last mountain pass, finishing in 2hr 40min 35sec. Jarno Widar won the sprint for second, 2min 39sec off the pace, with Felix Gall third.

Seven years after his only previous appearance in the Spanish race, Pogacar underlined why he started as the overwhelming favourite following a summer in which he claimed a fifth Tour de France title.

The UAE Team Emirates rider now leads the general classification by 3min 21sec over his compatriot Primoz Roglic of Red Bull-Bora-Hansgrohe, with Spain's Enric Mas of Movistar a further 11sec back.

"It's super good because now I can be calm and confident for the next days," Pogacar said. "We just keep going day by day and focus on each day after this, because it will be a bit less stressful. It was pretty tough but a beautiful day out there." **Agencies**

'I catch the signs a lot earlier than I did before'

Amanda Anisimova on burnout and bouncing back, as she heads to the US Open hoping to win her first major

Simon Cambers

▼ *Amanda Anisimova is one of the best players yet to win a grand slam*
MIKE COPPOLA/GETTY IMAGES

Amanda Anisimova can see the signs now. It is just over three years since the American announced she would be taking an indefinite break for mental health reasons. A brilliant junior, she was a semi-finalist at the French Open in 2019 and seemingly destined for the top, only for her world to be rocked by the sudden death of her father, Konstantin, a few months later. Struggling for motivation and burned out, in May 2023, she revealed she would be stepping away from the sport.

It turned out to be the best decision she ever made. "I learned how important it is to have a great balance on and off the court," Anisimova says in an interview from New York, ahead of the US Open, where she will try to go one better than last year and win her first grand slam title.

"That's something that I used to not prioritise so much: how to recharge myself and take time for myself, prioritise my wellbeing off the court. In the past, it was really just a lot of tennis and I didn't really know how to incorporate those small breaks for myself. I think that's a big reason why I reached such a breaking point and needed to take that time away from the sport."

Three years on, Anisimova is better able to feel when things are becoming too much. For a top tennis player, with a tour that's an 11-month grind, there are not many obvious opportunities for lengthy breaks, but Anisimova finds time for herself. If she is not feeling it on the practice or match court, she takes herself away.

"I feel like I've become so much more self-aware now of when I'm anticipating or feeling like I'm reaching that point where I don't feel as excited or as motivated," she says. "Those signs are much more alarming to me now, and I catch them a lot earlier than I did before.

"Before, sometimes I felt like that was a normal thing, but now I know that's not a normal thing to experience or go through. At least not to let it keep happening. It's obviously normal to get tired or burnt out, and we all have days where we don't feel like doing the things we need to do. It's about how to manage that and navigate that. I think that's been the biggest thing that I've learned, and that's helped me tremendously as an athlete."

Anisimova finished 2025 at No 4 in the rankings, a remarkable achievement, not least because of what happened to her at Wimbledon. After beating Aryna Sabalenka in the semi-finals with a brilliant performance, she crumbled in her first major final, frozen with fear, her feet stuck, her racket arm feeling like it weighed a ton. The result was a 6-0, 6-0 thumping by a ruthless Iga Swiatek and an unwanted place in the history books as the first woman to not win a game in a Wimbledon final in more than a century.

Many players would never have recovered from the experience but Anisimova's time away has helped her to see the bigger picture. As painful as the day was, reaching a first grand slam final was a huge milestone. "I try to have a lot of perspective, and I think that really grounds me in a lot of situations," says Anisimova, who was speaking as an ambassador for Pure Leaf Iced Tea. "When I take maybe 10 minutes for myself to just kind of reset and think about what it is I'm going through and have that perspective in mind, then I think that really helps me sometimes. And it's not something that I really had when I was 20, 21."

Her resilience is remarkable. She took revenge on Swiatek at the US Open to reach a second consecutive major final and pushed Sabalenka hard in the title decider. She won her fourth WTA Tour title in China and ended 2025 by making the last four at the WTA Finals. After hitting No 3 in January, a wrist injury stopped her momentum but she looks back on form, a quarter-final run in Cincinnati setting her up nicely for the US Open, playing at home in a tournament and on a surface she loves. "I feel like I found some rhythm on the court again," she says. "I'm looking forward to the US Open. Feeling good. It's my favourite time of the year by far."

With perhaps the best backhand on the tour, Anisimova has the firepower required of a major champion. Her timing could be very good, too, with many of the leading contenders for the US Open looking vulnerable, including defending champion Sabalenka, whose form has dipped in recent months. Coco Gauff won in Cincinnati but there is an opportunity for someone to come through. One of the best players yet to win a major, there is pressure on Anisimova to deliver, but she enjoys pushing herself.

"I have that eagerness and that motivation to achieve my dreams and win a grand slam one day. A lot of the things that it takes to get there, it's not as pretty or as glamorous as people think. But I love a challenge, and that's why I am where I am today. I'm a pro athlete, and you don't get to the place where you are without being uncomfortable. I think it's just embracing that. You're going to be uncomfortable 90% of the time, but I'm so driven by my goals, so that makes it easier and more enjoyable.

"It's always been a dream to win a grand slam. You don't really think about your dream as winning a [WTA] 1,000. It's always the biggest thing you can win, whether it's a grand slam or the Olympics, which both are huge dreams of athletes. For me, it was always the US Open. I think there's just something about winning a grand slam that completes a tennis player's life."

> ***'I think there's just something about winning a grand slam that completes a tennis player's life'***

Djokovic aced on match point in US Open loss with Sabalenka

Novak Djokovic and Aryna Sabalenka endured a first-round exit in the US Open mixed doubles after the top seeds surrendered a one-set lead to lose against Britain's Henry Patten and the Czech player Katerina Siniakova.

The high-profile pairing looked poised to progress to the quarter-finals after taking the first set 4-1. But Patten and Siniakova – two of the world's top-ranked doubles players – overcame early nerves to seal a 1-4, 4-2, 10-2 comeback victory at Arthur Ashe Stadium. Djokovic – a 24-time grand slam singles champion, including four US Open titles – was aced by Siniakova on match point in the deciding tie-break.

Patten, 30, said: "It wasn't looking very good for a while. In this format, we played one bad game and all of a sudden the first set's gone. We knew the same was possible in the second set and we played an amazing tie-break – Kat acing Novak on match point was pretty fun."

Patten and Siniakova were later defeated 5-4 (6), 4-5 (3), 10-8 by the married couple Gaël Monfils and Elina Svitolina in the quarter-finals.

The mixed doubles was revamped last year to include singles stars in a bid to attract greater attention to the format. A shorter scoring system was introduced, with only four games required to win a set in matches before the final, no "advantage" scoring, and 10-point match tie-breaks instead of a third set throughout. Monfils, playing in his final grand slam tournament before retiring, now needs two wins alongside his wife Svitolina to win the $1m prize on offer to the champions.

"Happy wife, happy life," Monfils said in their post-match interview after a kiss and hug on the court after match point. Svitolina said: "It's a shame that it's our first time that we're playing together but I think it makes all the team work."

Karolina Muchova and Jakub Mensik also reached the semi-finals with a 4-1, 5-3 victory against the American pair Emma Navarro and Tommy Paul.

Serena Williams and Carlos Alcaraz were due on court later in the first round of the 16-team event, in Williams's first match at the US Open since 2022. **Agencies**

◀ *The husband-and-wife team Gaël Monfils and Elina Svitolina enjoy a kiss and a hug on court after their quarter-final victory against Henry Patten and Katerina Siniakova*
YUKI IWAMURA/AP

▲ *The star pairing Aryna Sabalenka and Novak Djokovic lost a one-set lead*
EDUARDO MUÑOZ/REUTERS

Vondrousova appeals ban

The former Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova has appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport against her four-year ban for missing a doping test last year. Vondrousova was suspended in June after the International Tennis Integrity Agency said the Czech did not submit her sample when notified by a doping control officer in an out-of-competition test attempt at her home in December. The 27-year-old said in April that an officer arriving at 8.15pm, demanding an immediate test, felt like a serious intrusion into her privacy. Vondrousova has said she never doped, and a test taken three days after the December incident came back negative. Her ban ends on 21 June 21 2030, when she will be 30. Reuters

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The Guardian

Burnham 'heartbroken' after death of league legend Boston

Wigan to pay tribute to Billy Boston, one of the finest players in the sport's history

Aaron Bower

◀ *Billy Boston became the first rugby league player to be knighted for his services to the sport, which he received in 2025*
AARON CHOWN/PA

▶ *Sir Billy Boston is celebrated before the match between Wigan and Huddersfield at the Brick Community Stadium last year*
NIGEL FRENCH/PA

Andy Burnham says he is "heartbroken" by the death of Sir Billy Boston after the prime minister led tributes to the rugby league icon.

Boston died yesterday at the age of 92. He was one of the sport's all-time great players, scoring almost 500 tries during an illustrious career for Wigan Warriors and Great Britain, and last year became the first man in rugby league history to be knighted for his services to the game.

His death comes just four days after the funeral of his wife of more than 70 years, Lady Joan Boston, who died last month. Burnham, a lifelong rugby league supporter who also served as president of the Rugby Football League, described Boston as a "giant of a man in every way".

The prime minister wrote: "Heartbroken to hear my friend Sir Billy Boston has died. Billy was one of the greatest rugby league players of all time but also one of the kindest and most down-to-earth people you could ever wish to meet.

"He always had time for people and gave so much back to his adopted home, Wigan. I will miss him greatly and am thinking today of Billy's family, still grieving the recent loss of his beloved wife Joan. A giant of a man in every way. Thank you, Billy, and rest in peace."

Boston joined Wigan in 1953 after starting his rugby career in his native Wales. He went on to score 478 tries in 488 games for the club, winning a plethora of honours for club and country. Only one man, the Warrington winger Brian Bevan, has more tries in the history of the sport than Boston.

Less than a year after leaving Wales to begin a career in league, Boston became the first non-white player to be selected for Great Britain. He scored 36 tries in 18 games on that tour to Australia and New Zealand in 1954, and was part of the Lions' World Cup-winning squad of 1960.

Boston was awarded an MBE in 1996 but, last year, he became the first rugby league player to be knighted for services to the sport. That accolade was met with emotional celebrations in Wigan, the town in which he remained after retirement and where one of three statues – alongside those at Wembley and Cardiff – stands featuring Boston, which underlines his life and career.

The Warriors are planning for an emotional occasion tomorrow when they host Hull KR in Super League, with a series of tributes planned to celebrate Boston's life. Their head coach, Matt Peet, paid an emotional tribute yesterday while conducting his pre-match press duties. "It's like he was on a different planet, really," Peet said of Boston's career.

"I wish I could see more of him. I've seen bits of footage, but I think it's more the legend when people talk about him in terms of the stories and players that played against him, players that played with him. It's going to be a real tribute night on Thursday. Obviously, people are very upset and rightly so, but you've got to celebrate a life well lived. Everything that Billy represented and stood for.

"We have a responsibility to uphold the whole history of the club when you work at a club like this, but I think Billy's top of the tree in terms of standing in the club's history."

Kris Radlinski, the Wigan chief executive, said: "Today we mourn one of our greatest ever Warriors and rugby league's first knight. Time moves on, as it must, but some names endure. Billy Boston will always be one of them. His place in the history of Wigan, and in the history of rugby league, is secure for ever.

"I visited him on Sunday morning with Mandy [Johnston, Wigan's administrator], held his hand and told him we loved him. Rest in peace, Billy. My friend, our Warrior and a true Wigan legend."

Eamonn McManus, the chair of Wigan's biggest rivals, St Helens, said: "Sir Billy Boston was more than an all-time great of the sport of rugby league. His name both symbolised and transcended it. He was one of the greats for both Wigan and Great Britain in the golden era of our sport in the 1950s and 60s. He was a giant amongst giants.

"He led and epitomised our sport's and our communities' pioneering example in breaking down racial barriers in this country and he should be remembered always for that. Although deeply saddened by his passing we should in equal measure celebrate his unparalleled contribution to our sport and to our society."

◀ *Billy Boston bulldozes through three players in the Challenge Cup final at Wembley in 1959, where he scored two tries in Wigan's 30-13 victory against Hull*
MIRRORPIX/GETTY

FA gives green light to WSL academy sides in third tier

Four Women's Super League academy sides will play in the third tier of the pyramid from the 2027-28 season after the controversial proposal was approved by the Football Association's board.

The change forms part of what the FA described as a package of reforms to the Women's National League "designed to strengthen the women's football pyramid, raise standards across the league, and improve the development pathway for young players".

Data showed that young English players were getting significantly fewer competitive minutes than their counterparts across Europe's leading leagues, the FA said.

WNL clubs will receive central funding for the first time and changes to the loan market will encourage clubs from the top two divisions to loan players to clubs in the third and fourth tiers.

The WSL academy teams will not be eligible for promotion and will be chosen against criteria to be developed in the coming months, the FA said. With the third tier split into two geographical regions, it is expected that two academies will be placed in the northern division and two in the southern.

Sue Day, director of women's football at the FA, said: "The women's game has reached an important moment in its development, and these changes are about ensuring it continues to thrive for decades to come. We need to take proactive action now to address some of the key challenges we're facing.

"For the game to continue moving forward, the FA Women's National League must evolve alongside the professional game, and we need to create more opportunities for talented young English players to develop in senior football.

"Getting that balance right is essential to the long-term success of the national team, which in turn fuels the growth and visibility of the game at every level.

"The FA Women's National League sits at the heart of the women's football pyramid and has a unique identity that we value enormously. We'd like to thank the clubs and stakeholders for their engagement throughout the consultation process, and we look forward to continuing to work together." **Guardian sport**

> *'We need to create more opportunities for talented young English players to develop in senior football'*
>
> **Sue Day**
> *FA director of women's football*

▼ *Xavi Hernández's Netherlands will play Germany in September*
ROBIN UTRECHT/SHUTTERSTOCK

Xavi ready for big test as he takes charge of 'university of football'

Barcelona legend out to emulate Cruyff's total football philosophy after taking over as the Netherlands head coach

Arthur Renard
Zeist

'My feeling today is that I'm going to the university of football." Those were Xavi Hernández's opening words at his presentation as the Netherlands coach yesterday. "I learned a lot from this university of football during my career as a player and as a coach. I have many connections with this country."

Those connections date back to when Xavi was drafted as a youngster into La Masia, the famed Barcelona academy whose fundamentals are rooted in Dutch total football, inspired by Rinus Michels and Johan Cruyff. Xavi's first-team debut came under Louis van Gaal, and he spent many years under Frank Rijkaard before becoming one of the main pillars of the dream team under Pep Guardiola, who was inspired hugely by Cruyff.

Xavi opened a Cruyff court - a multifunctional sport space for children - with Cruyff in his home town of Terrassa in 2014, and yesterday shared special memories of his time with Cruyff, who died in 2016. "With Johan in the last period of his life I had some meetings," he said. "And he was always positive. Even when he was sick. This is what I learned: always smiling. This is what I want to show here to the players. My first goal is to help them, and then enjoy the process. And we will be in a process to win."

Xavi says he wants to "dominate the game, to take the initiative with the ball and at the same time our goal is to show everybody a team with passion, with desire and ambition - and this is very important for me as a coach".

In the Netherlands, there has always been a strong emphasis on attacking football, which is why Xavi fitted the bill. The Catalan was asked whether he would use five defenders, as Van Gaal and Ronald Koeman did at times in recent years. "That this is not my idea," he said. "We want to play in another system [like] 4-3-3, 4-2-3-1, 3-4-3. In those systems we can dominate the game more."

Xavi said he had spoken to Frenkie de Jong - whom he coached at Barcelona - and Virgil van Dijk. He added that he would speak again to Van Dijk, the captain, in the near future to hear his ambitions with the team. The 46-year-old was also clear that he is willing to select players from the Saudi Pro League, something more relevant after Tijjani Reijnders moved from Manchester City to Al-Qadsiah last week. Two years ago, Koeman was clear when Steven Bergwijn moved to Al-Ittihad that the forward would no longer be selected because the league did not match the level he expected from his players.

"It's a good league as well," Xavi said. "Maybe we choose players from Saudi, from Eredivisie, Premier League, La Liga. I don't care about the leagues, I care about the performances and the players."

> ***'We want to play in another system [like] 4-3-3, 3-4-3. In those we can dominate the game more'***

Nigel de Jong, the director of elite football at the Dutch football federation (KNVB), had earlier been open about the process that led to Xavi's appointment. He said he had first tested the waters with Guardiola, who indicated he did not want to take a job in the near future, before holding two meetings with Arne Slot, who eventually chose to remain a club coach. De Jong then invited Xavi to Amsterdam for a meeting also attended by Clarence Seedorf, a member of the KNVB's supervisory board. The following day De Jong and Seedorf spoke with Michael Reiziger, the Netherlands' under-21s coach, who played alongside Xavi at Barcelona.

They were considering promoting Reiziger in a way similar to Luis de la Fuente's journey with Spain, his knowledge of the country's upcoming talents regarded as a major plus. When the meeting with Reiziger became known in the Dutch media, there was an assumption the former full-back would become the national team coach. But then, on 12 August, the KNVB announced Xavi, a decision that seemingly came out of the blue.

Xavi said he was fine with the process. "It's not a bad position, after Guardiola and after Slot, no? At least you are at the podium. I don't care if I'm the third [choice] or 10th. It's a big honour to be here. He [De Jong] explained to me: 'We need your philosophy, we need to change with ambition, passion.' And we will work in this way."

First up for Xavi is a Nations League game against Germany in Amsterdam on 24 September, when he will face Jürgen Klopp, who is also starting a new job. "I feel excited," Xavi said, "because we are playing against Germany, one of the best teams in Europe, one of the best coaches in recent years."

Xavi, speaking in front of his staff, including Ruud van Nistelrooy, wants his team to adopt the Dutch style he saw as a young boy. "I remember when I was a kid, watching the Netherlands and watching good football, and this is my way, this is my target."

Delap heads to Forest as Chelsea open talks to sell Jackson to Villa

Jacob Steinberg

Nottingham Forest have agreed a deal worth £50m to sign Liam Delap from Chelsea, who have opened talks over selling Nicolas Jackson to Aston Villa. Xabi Alonso has made João Pedro and Danny Welbeck his main strikers this season, leaving his other frontmen to seek opportunities elsewhere.

Forest were one of several clubs interested in Delap, who has struggled since joining Chelsea from Ipswich for £30m last summer, and will pay a club record of £45m plus £5m in add-ons for the 23-year-old.

Delap managed only one league goal last season and was hindered by injuries after leaving Ipswich. But the former Manchester City striker has a chance to revive his career at the City Ground.

Chelsea are focused on outgoings before the transfer window shuts next Tuesday and are also hoping to sell Jackson, who was on loan at Bayern Munich last season. The Senegal international is valued at £65m and has been earmarked by Villa as a potential replacement for Ollie Watkins, who is expected to join the Saudi Pro League side Al-Hilal.

▲ *Forest will pay a club-record £45m plus £5m in add-ons for Liam Delap*

Chelsea are not willing to agree to another loan for Jackson and want his valuation met but Villa are likely to press for a favourable payment schedule to ensure they can afford a permanent deal. Atlético Madrid are also interested in the 25-year-old, who joined Chelsea from Villarreal in 2023. Unai Emery, Villa's manager, worked with Jackson at Villarreal.

West Ham's clearout after relegation from the Premier League is expected to continue with El Hadji Malick Diouf joining **Brentford** for about £35m. The clubs are in discussions over a deal for the left-back and an agreement is likely soon.

Diouf wants to leave and was left out of the squad when Nuno Espírito Santo's side continued their disappointing start to the Championship season by losing 2-1 at home against Charlton last Saturday. West Ham signed the Senegal international for £19m from Slavia Prague last year. Nuno, who is understood to be under growing pressure after West Ham's flat start, has had his hand weakened by a host of players hoping to force their way out. The Mexico midfielder Edson Álvarez is the subject of interest from Olympiakos and Real Sociedad.

Torino have had a bid rejected for the midfielder Soungoutou Magassa, who is on Crystal Palace's shortlist. Marseille could sign the French centre-back Jean-Clair Todibo. West Ham have raised funds through the sales of Mateus Fernandes, Crysencio Summerville and Freddie Potts.

United take midfield spend to £148m with Baleba signing

Manchester United have completed the signing of the Brighton midfielder Carlos Baleba in a deal worth up to £70m. The Cameroon international is the third midfielder to join this summer, after Andrey Santos and Youri Tielemans.

Baleba has signed a five-year contract with the option to extend for 12 months after United agreed a £65m deal plus £5m in add-ons and a sell-on with Brighton. It takes the club's spend on midfielders to about £148m. Santos and Tielemans have arrived from Chelsea and Aston Villa respectively during a summer when Casemiro left and Manuel Ugarte sustained a serious knee injury.

"It is an incredible feeling to join the club of my dreams," Baleba said. "Playing at Old Trafford is always special but the opportunity to do so as a Manchester United player will be a real honour.

"I cannot wait to work with Michael Carrick. His experience and knowledge of the game make him the perfect coach to help me to reach the highest level.

"The ambition of everyone at the club is extremely clear, the future is hugely exciting, and I am determined to play my part in delivering the success that we are capable of together."

United made a move to bring in Baleba last summer but cooled their pursuit when Brighton made it clear he was not leaving. Baleba was not at his best last season but that did not put off United, who stepped up their interest in the 22-year-old a week ago.

United's director of football, Jason Wilcox, said: "Carlos is an elite midfielder with immense potential to develop further. He brings a unique combination of qualities that will really complement our squad.

"We are delighted to further strengthen our midfield with the addition of another established senior international with a track record of performing in the Premier League." **PA Media and Guardian sport**

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▲ *Carlos Baleba has signed a five-year contract at Old Trafford*

◀ *Roberto de Zerbi feels Sávio will be worth the wait after a dismal start*
COLORSPORT/SHUTTERSTOCK; TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR FC/ SHUTTERSTOCK; TOM JENKINS/THE GUARDIAN

Premier League

De Zerbi hopes Sávio's fresh start will help Spurs' chances of revival

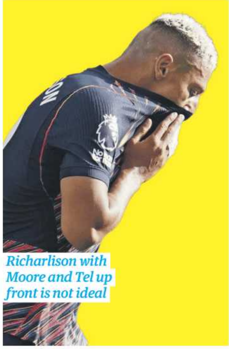
After their unacceptable display at Brentford, manager still believes the club can avoid that sinking feeling

David Hytner

What's in a name? Quite a bit, judging by the discussion at Roberto De Zerbi's Tottenham press conference yesterday, shortly after the club had completed the £75m signing of Savinho from Manchester City and the Brazil winger had let everybody know that he wanted to be called Sávio from now on. He will have that name on his Spurs shirt above his No 17, which he has taken over from Cristian Romero, the former captain who has moved to Atlético Madrid.

The 22-year-old went by Sávio at various times before his two seasons at City but there was nonetheless speculation about the reasons for the reversion. Savinho translates roughly from the Portuguese as "little Sávio". Was it him saying that he was now an older and more mature player?

On the subject of theories, there is one about the fee, which could rise to £85m in add-ons. Even at £75m, it represents a record sale for City, who paid £30.8m to take Sávio from Troyes. Spurs are pushing to sign another attacker from City - Omar Marmoush, whose previous club Eintracht Frankfurt have a sell-on clause. Are Spurs paying more for Sávio in order to pay potentially less to City for Marmoush, which could reduce the liabilities to Eintracht?



Richarlison with Moore and Tel up front is not ideal

De Zerbi has plenty on his plate after Spurs' dismal 3-0 defeat at Brentford on Saturday in their Premier League opener and before the Carabao Cup tie at home against Charlton tonight. "Listen, I lost 3-0 in the first game in the Premier League … do you think for me it's a problem if Savinho becomes Sávio?" he said, turning to face his interpreter. "If Enrico [the interpreter] becomes Savinho, it's a problem. If Savinho stays Sávio, nothing changes for me."

De Zerbi said the talks for Sávio had started three days after the end of last season. It has been a mini-epic to get the deal over the line but well worth it, according to the Spurs manager, who rates Sávio as one of the best in the world for being able to get past his marker when one-against-one. The challenge for Sávio will be to improve his end product, particularly in terms of goals. He scored only seven for City in all competitions and only two in 53 Premier League appearances. Sávio is available for selection against Charlton, his paperwork having been completed in time.

De Zerbi did get around to accepting that Sávio's rebrand was part of a fresh start for the player. What is not in doubt is Spurs' need for one after Brentford, when all the excitement around a summer of heavy spending turned to frustration; a very familiar sinking feeling. It is possible to explain away the shambles against Brentford, who were not only much more joined-up but appeared to want it more in the duels. De Zerbi has attempted to do so in that way beloved of managers, emphasising he is not making excuses, you understand, just stating facts.

He had a completely new back four compared with his preferred unit from the end of last season; a new midfield pair, too. Up front from right to left, Mikey Moore, Richarlison and Mathys Tel were nobody's idea of a trio to drive the push for Champions League football. De Zerbi was missing a host of players because of fitness issues, including Pedro Porro, Micky van de Ven, Mateus Fernandes and Dominic Solanke. Some of the issues can be traced to the slog of a pre-season tour to New Zealand and Australia, which De Zerbi continues to reference in irritated tones.

> ***'I lost 3-0 in the first game … do you think for me it's a problem if Savinho becomes Sávio?'***

These *facts* do not really wash. The performance against Brentford was unacceptable. There is the sense it will work out for Spurs, mainly because they have De Zerbi and a collection of Premier League-ready new signings. They have certainly put themselves under pressure for the visit of Charlton. A relevant statistic: Spurs have won one domestic home game in 2026 - against Everton on the final day of last season which enabled them to avoid relegation.

De Zerbi made the point that he and the squad had "started the project right now, not last season". Which was when he was parachuted in with seven games to go; he picked up 11 points to dodge the unthinkable. "Last season, we fought to stay up," he said. The inference was it would take rather more to become a proper team.

On the other hand, the experiences of the previous campaign do offer reassurance. "Maybe last season was a tougher challenge to stay up than this season," De Zerbi said. "I said to the players: last season, in a worse situation, we showed character, we showed balls. We showed pride and quality. Now we have to stay calm and to analyse better the situation - not to have an emotional reaction. We have to be intelligent."

What De Zerbi craves is consistency, which he defined as being five wins in a row. It seems a distant goal after Brentford but De Zerbi has faith. What it will take is a change to the collective mentality. "We have to get used to winning games and games and games - we have to change habits from the last two seasons," he said.

"For me, the Carabao Cup is like the Premier League. We are not in the condition to make differences [between the competitions]. We have to play well and get used to winning - and winning matches, not a match. We have to change the mood. And we can."

De Zerbi said Porro and Van de Ven would return as substitutes against Charlton and Solanke was available to start. James Maddison is a doubt with a shoulder problem. De Zerbi has a decision to make on Sávio. Victory is non-negotiable.

Carabao Cup *Second round*

Torp applies finishing touch in Coventry rally

Plymouth	**2**
Irow 21, Amaechi 54	
Coventry	**4**
Awoniyi 3, Rudoni 5, Mason-Clark 67, Torp 78pen	

Ben Fisher
Home Park

A midweek trip to Devon always had the makings of an awkward trip for a Coventry side focused on Premier League survival. Such feelings evaporated when Frank Lampard's side raced into a two-goal lead inside five minutes, Taiwo Awoniyi opening his account for his new club before Jack Rudoni added Coventry's second. But, ultimately, Coventry were made to toil before earning victory.

Plymouth had form for a cup upset and another was brewing when Xavier Amaechi pulled Tom Cleverley's side level nine minutes into the second half. Coventry, to their credit, roused once more, the substitute Ephron Mason-Clark regaining the lead before Victor Torp sealed progress to the Carabao Cup third round from the penalty spot.

As Gustavo Hamer, one of nine changes from the Coventry team that began Friday's defeat at Arsenal, took kick-off, the visitors' intentions were clear. The centre-backs Liam Kitching, captain for the night, and Bobby Thomas, were the only players not to start on the halfway line and Coventry quickly got to work. Thomas and Caleb Yirenkyi were the only players retained from the XI that opened their Premier League campaign and the latter's sumptuous first-time flick from Kitching's pass freed Awoniyi in on goal inside three minutes. Awoniyi applied a cool side-foot finish and there were only four minutes and six seconds on the clock when Awoniyi turned provider, releasing Rudoni to double Coventry's advantage.

At that point, the 2,100 Coventry supporters, many of whom made an eight-hour, 444-mile round trip, cycled through the back catalogue of songs. Then Lampard obliged when they craved a wave from a manager who led them back to the top flight after 25 years away. But the game did not turn the non-event most would have envisaged and instead an absorbing cup tie unfolded. Cleverley accepted the game, for his team, was "a little bit of a free hit".

And Plymouth were suddenly liberated. Mathias Ross sent a free header wide from a free-kick and a couple of minutes later Irow read Harvey White's flighted pass and the Tottenham loanee, 24 hours after signing, drove inside Joel Latibeaudiere and drilled past Dan Bentley, the Coventry goalkeeper on debut. From there, aside from Awoniyi heading wide unmarked, Coventry had to withstand plenty of Plymouth pressure and the hosts should have restored parity just after the half-hour. Bentley fumbled White's speculative shot from outside the box and Evans pounced on the rebound but Bentley managed to divert Evans's shot on to his left post.

Aurèle Amenda replaced Thomas at the interval. For Cleverley, this was also a touchline duel with a friend and a former England teammate. "All the young English coaches want people like Frank to do well," Plymouth's head coach said before the game.

Cleverley knew the value of an upset, Lampard the damage of defeat. Rudoni sent a fizzing first-time effort narrowly wide from Awoniyi's smart layoff a few minutes into the second half but Amaechi, who replaced Caleb Watts at half-time, levelled on 54 minutes. Ameachi swarmed Kitching, pinching the ball after the Coventry defender got in a tangle and then fired a left-foot shot in at Bentley's near post. Plymouth freshened things up with a triple substitution, including the academy graduates Tegan Finn and Caleb Roberts.

Lampard, meanwhile, turned to Mason-Clark, this his first appearance of the season after a hamstring issue. It was a galling goal from a Plymouth perspective. Tatsuhiro Sakamoto's cross from the right caused confusion in the Plymouth box, Mason-Clark at first failing to divert the ball goalwards. But Torp was alert to the ball dropping at the back post and squared to provide Mason-Clark the simplest of finishes, the forward poking in from inside the six-yard box.

Lampard made a triple sub himself, Sidiki Cherif replacing Awoniyi, while Josh Eccles and Brandon Thomas-Asante also entered. Joe Edwards arrived from the bench but his first action was to swipe at Thomas-Asante in the box when trying to clear the leftovers of a Coventry corner, giving the referee, Elliott Swallow, no choice but to award a penalty. Torp capped the scoring, thrashing the spot-kick into the top corner.

Plymouth **4-2-3-1**	**Coventry** **4-2-3-1**
Storer; Mwaro, Ross, Harding, Sorinola; Bakinson, (Edwards 74) White (Roberts 59); Ibrahim, Watts (Amaechi ● ht), Irow (Finn 59); Evans (Pepple 59)	Bentley; Latibeaudiere ●, Kitching, Thomas (Amenda ht), Bidwell; Torp, Yirenkyi (Eccles ● 70); Rudoni (Mason-Clark 62), Hamer (Thomas-Asante 70), Sakamoto; Awoniyi (Cherif 70)

Referee Elliott Swallow **Attendance** 14,210

Hornets humbled

Watford mananger Alessio Dionisi gambled by making 11 changes in the Carabao Cup – and the move backfired as League One Peterborough stormed into the third round with a 5-1 victory. Dionisi, with an eye on Saturday's home Championship clash with West Ham, fielded a back four made up entirely of debutants which was torn to shreds, with Harry Leonard getting two of the Posh goals. Elsewhere, Leeds beat Nottingham Forest 2-0 at the City Ground with second-half goals from Dan James and James Justin, while Brentford romped to a 6-1 win at Birmingham, which included a Nathan Collins double. Agencies

Plymouth made to pay the penalty

Victor Torp fires in a fourth goal for Coventry to secure their progress to the third round of the Carabao Cup
DAVID DAVIES/PA

Joshua glee West Ham's 19-year-old forward Joshua Ajala scored twice to lead a fightback in the Carabao Cup at Southampton. After Léo Scienza's early opener for the hosts, Ajala turned the tie around before Taty Castellanos and Jarrod Bowen wrapped up a 4-1 win.

JAMES MARSH/SHUTTERSTOCK

Results

Football

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE
Playoffs: Second leg

LASK	(-) **L**	**Celtic** (agg 0-3)	(-) **L**

Bodø/Glimt 3 NEC 0 (agg 6 -1); Sabah 5 Hapoel Be'er Sheva 2 (agg 6-4)

CARABAO EFL CUP
Second round

Cardiff Salech 90+3 5,432	(0) **1**	**Norwich** Kvistgaarden 25 Crnac 78	(1) **2**
Doncaster Hutchinson 90+2	(0) **1**	**Middlesbrough** Joseph 34, Lankshear 78 Sarmiento 87	(1) **3**
Barnsley Cleary 29, Noslin 31 O'Keeffe 38	(3) **3**	**Crewe** Thibaut 21, Ewusi 89 3,002	(1) **2**
Blackburn Afolayan 55 6,826	(0) **1**	**Sheffield United** Cannon 20 Donovan 81	(1) **2**
Blackpool Clarkson 45 2,407	(1) **1**	**Lincoln** Olaofe 36, Bayliss 53 Street 55, Elder 77	(1) **4**
Cambridge United	(0) **0**	**Millwall** Cooper 10	(1) **1**
Fleetwood Boyle 8og, Evans 28 35 Davies 90	(3) **4**	**Shrewsbury**	(0) **0**
Ipswich Egeli 62 Núñez 71 90+1	(0) **3**	**Leicester** Aluko 67 21,559	(0) **1**
Plymouth Irow 21, Amaechi 54 14,210	(1) **2**	**Coventry** Awoniyi 3, Rudoni 5 Mason-Clark 67, Torp 78pen	(2) **4**
Sheffield Wed 13,586	(0) **0**	**Wolves** Swinkels 3og, Olagunju 45+1	(2) **2**
Southampton Scienza 10	(1) **1**	**West Ham** Ajala 41 53 Castellanos 75, Bowen 84	(1) **4**
Stevenage Williams 85	(0) **0**	**Reading** Brown 9, Lane 24, Williams 85	(2) **3**
Stoke Bozenik 39 (Hull won 5-4 on pens)	(1) **1**	**Hull** Dowell 45 7,141	(1) **1**
Walsall (Leyton Orient won 6-5 on pens)	(0) **0**	**Leyton Orient**	(0) **0**
Watford Doumbia 73 7,978	(0) **1**	**Peterborough** Clarridge 10og Leonard 23 51 Shofowoke 55, Jones 64	(2) **5**
Birmingham Gray 28	(1) **1**	**Brentford** Wilson 6, Hickey 35 Collins 40 77, Damsgaard 70 Thiago 73	(3) **6**
Nottingham Forest 24,542	(0) **0**	**Leeds** Jame s 50 Justin 75	(0) **2**

WOMEN'S CHAMPIONS LEAGUE
Third qualifying round: First leg Brann 2 Austria Wien 1

VERTU EFL TROPHY
Southern: Group C Bristol Rovers 2 Chelsea U21 2 (Chelsea U21 won 4-2 on pens)

KDM EVOLUTION TROPHY
League Stage Airdrieonians 1 Stirling 3; Alloa 3 Motherwell II 0; Annan 2 Berwick 2; Bonnyrigg Rose 2 Rangers II 1; Clachnacuddin 0 Elgin 2; Cove 2 Dundee Utd II 0; Cowdenbeath 1 East Kilbride 3; Cumbernauld Colts 1 Kilmarnock II 1; Dumbarton 2 Celtic II 2; East Fife 2 St Mirren II 5; Forfar L Formartine L; Fraserburgh 1 Aberdeen II 1; Hamilton Academical 0 Edinburgh City 1; Kelty 2 Clydebank 4; Montrose 3 Clyde 0; Peterhead 2 Dundee II 1; Queen of the South 1 Hibernian II 0; Ross 4 Banks O' Dee 0; Stranraer 3 Gala Fairydean 0; The Spartans 5 Hearts II 0

Rugby union

MEN'S INTERNATIONALS
Johannesburg Lions 35 New Zealand 41

Cricket

SECOND MEN'S TEST (third day of five)
Colombo India 503-9 dec (D Padikkal 117, DC Jurel 115, RR Pant 63, S Gill 50; AM Fernando 4-106). Sri Lanka 265-8 (GS Dinusha 85, DPS Sooriyabandara 80). Sri Lanka trail India by 238 runs with two first-innings wickets remaining.

Tennis

US OPEN (Flushing Meadows, New York)
Men: Singles: Qualification: First round *(selected)*
M Antonius (US) bt H Searle (GB) 6-1 6-2

Women: Singles: Qualification: First round *(selected)*
G Maristany Zuleta de Reales (Sp) bt J Burrage (GB) 7-6 (1) 6-4; **H Dart** (GB) bt J Hazelitt (US) 6-0 6-7 (1) 6-1

Cycling

VUELTA A ESPAÑA (Spain)
Stage 4 Andorra La Vella -> Andorra La Vella (104.8km): **1** T Pogacar (Svn) UAE Emirates-XRG 2hr 40min 35sec; **2** J Widar (Bel) Lotto-Intermarche +2m 39s; **3** F Gall (Aut) Decathlon CMA CGM; **4** O Onley (GB) Netcompany Ineos; **5** S Kuss (USA) Visma | Lease a Bike at the same time. **Selected others: 19** B Tulett (GB) Visma | Lease a Bike +7:48; **22** F Pickering (GB) Jayco-AlUla +8:13

Overall standings: 1 T Pogacar (Svn) UAE Team Emirates-XRG 7:38:59; **2** P Roglic (Svn) Red Bull-BORA-hansgrohe +3:21; **3** E Mas (Sp) Movistar +3:32; **4** S Kuss (US) Visma | Lease a Bike +3:44; **5** O Onley (GB) Netcompany Ineos +3:45. **Selected others: 19** B Tulett (GB) Visma | Lease a Bike +8:44; **25** F Pickering (GB) Jayco-AlUla +9:54; **37** T Gloag (GB) Pinarello-Q36.5 +15:17

Snooker

WST WUHAN OPEN (China)
First round: A Carter (Eng) bt K Wilson (Eng) 5-4; **Chang B** (Chn) bt Liu H (Chn) 5-1; **Pang J** (Chn) bt S Murphy (Eng) 5-3; **N Robertson** (Aus) bt H Vafaei (Irn) 5-3; **R O'Sullivan** (Eng) bt Yao P (Chn) 5-1; **Si J** (Chn) bt D Emery (Wal) 5-1; **S Maguire** (Sco) bt A Zizins (Lat) 5-4; **D Wells** (Wal) bt M Holt (Eng) 5-0; **B Hawkins** (Eng) bt R Day (Wal) 5-3; Zhao X (Chn) bt J Jones (Wal) 5-2; **M Selby** (Eng) bt He G (Chn) 5-2

Fixtures

Football (7.45pm unless stated)
Champions League
Playoffs: Second leg AEK Athens (0) v Levski Sofia (0) (8pm); Celje (1) v Slovan Bratislava (1) (8pm); Lyon (1) v Fenerbahce (1) (8pm); Viking (2) v Dinamo Zagreb (2) (8pm)
Conference League
Playoffs: Second leg Rapid Vienna (2) v Hearts (2) (5.45pm)
Carabao EFL Cup
Second round Bradford v Burnley; Preston v Everton (8pm); Newcastle v West Brom; Tottenham v Charlton
Women's Champions League
Third qualifying round: First leg Ajax v Real Madrid (6.30pm); Chelsea v Real Sociedad (6.45pm); Czarni Sosnowiec v OH Leuven (6pm); Eintracht Frankfurt v Paris Saint-Germain (6pm); PSV v Køge (6pm); Sparta Praha v Servette Chênois (5.30pm); St Pölten v Juventus; Wolfsburg v Internazionale (5pm)

Cricket
Metro Bank One-Day Cup Women
Hampshire v Lancashire, Utilita Bowl; Somerset v Durham, Taunton; Warwickshire v The Blaze, Edgbaston; Yorkshire v Surrey, Ampleforth

Greg Wood's racing tips

Wolverhampton **2.00** Sub Thirteen **2.30** Lovely Dark Angel **3.00** Diamondinthedark **3.30** V Power **4.00** Spaceage Love Song **4.35** On Key

Catterick **2.15** Shaniko **2.45** Moonlight Melody **3.15** Run This Way (nb) **3.45** Niffler **4.15** Our Absent Friends (nap) **4.52** Without Delay

Newbury **4.10** Mobadir **4.45** Chevere **5.20** Martaban **5.55** Somers Isles **6.30** Zatsgood **7.00** Bold Shout **7.30** Edwin Hubble

Kempton **6.20** Al Wathba **6.51** Kaindy **7.21** Ghisa **7.51** Gloryous **8.21** Arry Up **8.51** Cosmo Brown

Root reads from the same old script in England’s tiresome soap opera

Captain urges need to deliver on responsibilities ‘time and time again’ – but he won’t be drawn on when it was lost

Simon Burnton

England won the first game of their last Test series, against New Zealand at Lord’s, but between that match and the second Ben Stokes and Gus Atkinson were involved in a headline-grabbing incident at a London nightclub. “I’m angry, frustrated at having to sit here and talk through this,” Rob Key said a couple of days later.

“I feel disappointed that I’m here talking about this because there’s so much we’ve tried to do, so much we’ve tried to learn from, and I believe that as a team, the way they’ve carried themselves in the lead-up to last week’s game, the way they played that Test match – to then be now talking about this, is just incredibly frustrating.”

▲ *Ben Stokes was involved in the previous headline-grabbing incident*

England won the first game of this Test series, against Pakistan at Headingley, but between that match and the second Brydon Carse was involved in a headline-grabbing incident at a Derby nightclub. “If I’m being brutally honest, I’m really hacked off. I’m really disappointed that after last week’s performance we’re sat here talking about something not related to it at all,” Joe Root said a couple of days later.

“I look at all of the great things we did in that game – I thought the bowlers were outstanding, with the bat there were a couple of times we found ourselves under pressure and we worked our way through it. Every time we sit here and we’re talking about something off the field it’s really frustrating.”

Two months and four days separated the two press conferences, a period in which a great deal changed for this team – the New Zealand series was lost, as was a coach and a captain – but also, it seems, nothing at all. So the frustration expressed by Key and Root is also being felt, for different reasons, by those who have had to listen to them. Graham Gooch once famously asked Ian Botham, as it happens after a Test against Pakistan at Lord’s, where the teams will be reunited tomorrow: “Who writes your scripts?” Whoever is scripting the latest series of the soap opera needs to do a bit less recycling and get some fresh ideas.

Root suggests that this is

Rewind to … infamous Test

England’s last win over Pakistan at Lord’s came 16 years ago this week. The tourists have twice triumphed there since, securing four-day wins over Alastair Cook’s 2016 side and Joe Root’s 2018 vintage, but spooling back to 2010 takes us to of one of cricket’s darkest days. England cruised to an innings victory thanks to Jonathan Trott’s 184 and Graeme Swann’s nine wickets as Pakistan were bowled out for 74 and 147. But on the final day the News of the World reported that Salman Butt, Mohammad Asif and Mohammad Amir had deliberately bowled no-balls during England’s innings at prearranged moments for money. They were later found guilty of conspiracy to cheat at gambling and conspiracy to accept corrupt payments, and all three received jail sentences and bans from cricket.

▼ *Joe Root prepares for Pakistan at Lord’s after another off-field saga*
BEN WHITLEY/PA

Rothesay
TEST SERIES
WE ARE ENGLAND CRICKET
TOYOTA
Rothesay
Protecting Pensions
gobolt

now guaranteed, given that since the squad reassembled in London he has led them through "conversations about what is expected from this group of players, what it means to play for England, what it takes to play for England … a very robust discussion about where we currently sit". The players now know the standards of behaviour expected from them on and off the field. "I think there's real clarity there, and now the guys can concentrate on focusing on what is important this week, and making sure we prepare properly and diligently for all the challenges that this surface and Pakistan are going to provide."

It is not just bewildering but damning that after Harry Brook's run-in with a bouncer in Wellington, after the first Ashes Test was followed by a squad-break-cum-stag-do in the Queensland beach resort of Noosa, after the then Test head coach Brendon McCullum promised to "use a firm grip to ensure that we are not making those same mistakes again", and after Stokes's and Atkinson's night at Chelsea's Rex Rooms, this was a job that still needed doing.

Key, managing director of the England men's side, was all smiles in the Lord's sunshine as he watched the team train yesterday, apparently not feeling the sense of profound personal humiliation that the need for Root to lead a "robust discussion" might reasonably have provoked. "I don't think it has to be rocket science," Root said of a task that a succession of people older and more experienced than him have evidently bungled, if they attempted it at all. "It's being clear what your responsibilities are as a player and then delivering on that time and time again."

More than 15 years after his Test debut, and with Stephen Fleming about to become the eighth interim or permanent coach under whom he has played, Root has certainly been through periods when the team had that clarity. But he would not be drawn on when, and under whom, it had been lost. "I don't want to get caught up in digging up what's happened before. My concern is what happens moving from this point," he said.

"It's not something you want to forget about in a week's time, or six months' time. This is something that we want to live and breathe every day and that's what my focus is on. I don't think it's going to be helpful talking about what happened in that last period."

Root used the word "proud" a dozen times during his remarks to the press, and it is an emotion everyone associated with this team will want to enjoy with greater regularity. "I don't know how long I'm going to play Test cricket for," he said.

"It sounds a bit of a cliche, but you want to leave the dressing room in a better place than where you found it. Well, this is the opportunity that lies ahead and we have to start acting on that straight away."

Stephen Fleming is due to arrive as full-time coach next month

'We're going to have to earn a lot of trust back'

Continued *from back page*

something that lives alongside what we achieved [in defeating Pakistan at Headingley] last week. I thought the way we played was exceptional and we have to align that with being exceptional off the field as well, and understand what that looks like and how we want to represent ourselves and our nation.

"We're going to have to earn a lot of trust back, and it's something we're going to have to live and breathe consistently."

As the squad gathered before the second Test against Pakistan, which starts at Lord's tomorrow, and in the absence of their full-time coach, Stephen Fleming, who is due to arrive in the country next month, Root led what he termed "a very robust discussion" during which the group were reminded of their responsibilities as international cricketers.

"There are certain things that I do believe should stay in a dressing room. It is a sacred place," he said of that conversation. "But don't worry, they are very clear of what is expected of them and how we need to go about things moving forward."

One of Root's first acts after returning to the captaincy at the end of last month was to cancel the curfew that had been imposed on players after a string of embarrassing incidents over the winter. "I still don't believe that's the way to go," he said yesterday. "I think it's important that we create something bigger than that.

"It's about having something that we can pass on to the next generation of players. I might only be in this dressing room for a couple more years. There's a group of players there that are going to be around for the next 10, and they can live and breathe something and achieve something over that period of time. And this is where that can start. I've made it very clear what is expected of them."

> ***'There are things that should stay in the dressing room. It is a sacred place'***
>
> **Joe Root**
> *England Test captain*

Cricket's grim truth

Carse incident points to a darker side about life as a professional player

The Secret Cricket Coach

I once played with a young cricketer who would physically harm himself when he didn't score enough runs. I won't go into the detail of how because that isn't really the point. The point is that a young professional cricketer had reached a place where getting out in a game of cricket meant he deserved to be hurt. The strange thing is that I understood it. Not the act itself, which was obviously extreme, but the feeling behind it. Cricket meant that much to him. It meant that much to all of us.

Nobody had ever told him that his value as a person depended on how many runs he scored. Cricket had been telling him, in more subtle ways, for years. I thought about him again when I read about Brydon Carse.

I don't know Carse and I don't know what happened beyond what has been reported, so this isn't really about that particular incident. It just felt familiar. Another cricketer, another night out, and another conversation about why professional sportsmen can't just behave themselves.

I didn't drink when I played. At all. It wasn't a moral position, I just didn't drink, and if anything that made me unusual. Drinking was completely normal in professional cricket. I watched players who were incredibly serious about their cricket, train hard, practise for hours, worry about their weight and obsess about their performances and then drink extraordinary amounts of alcohol. I could never really get my head around the contradiction. I think I understand it a little better now, because the longer I have spent around cricket the more I have wondered whether some of the things we regard as character, toughness or simply part of being a cricketer are actually ways of coping with being one.

Playing professional cricket hurts. There is the obvious physical pain. Fast bowlers spend large parts of their careers with something hurting. Batters get hit, backs ache and knees deteriorate.

The mental side is probably more interesting, though. Cricket is a brutal game. You can practise brilliantly all week, feel in great form and nick your first ball. You can bowl well and get smashed everywhere. You can be playing well and get left out, or playing badly and know everyone can see it. Then there are contracts, injuries, younger players coming through and coaches deciding somebody else is better. You are basically being judged all the time.

That judgment starts really young. The pathway finds the children who are better at batting and bowling and moves them on. Then it judges them again. County age group, academy, second team, professional contract, first team and eventually, for a very small number, international cricket. The level changes but the question doesn't really: are you good enough? We talk a lot about developing people in cricket and I'm not completely convinced we do. We develop cricketers. We get better and better at teaching them to bat and bowl, preparing them physically and finding little things that might make them perform better. But ultimately the system has always had a straightforward measure of whether you are any good. Runs and wickets.

What does that do to somebody after 10 or 15 years? If you have spent most of your childhood being told that the thing that makes you different is that you are good at cricket, it seems fairly obvious that eventually some of your sense of worth gets wrapped up in being good at cricket. You get selected and you feel good. You score runs and people tell you how good you are. Then you get nought, or you get dropped, or your body breaks.

> *Maybe alcohol wasn't simply something cricketers liked doing. Maybe it worked as a coping mechanism*

Brydon Carse's incident just felt familiar

I played with some incredibly confident cricketers who were also incredibly insecure people. I used to think that was strange. I'm not sure I do any more. Maybe cricket actually creates some of that insecurity. The approval is always conditional and you are never that far away from someone deciding somebody else is better.

People find ways of dealing with that. Some drank. Some took drugs. Some disappeared into themselves. Some practised obsessively after failure because doing more was the only response they knew. Players played injured and pretended they weren't. Humour covered a lot. So did bravado.

These are obviously very different behaviours with very different consequences, but I wonder whether they can sometimes perform a similar function. Something has happened that I can't deal with, or I feel something I don't want to feel, so I find something that changes the feeling. For one person that might mean going back into the nets. For another it might mean getting drunk. For the young player I knew it became something much darker.

Players could spend six or seven hours completely consumed by cricket. Someone might have got nought. Someone else might have taken five wickets. Someone might have spent the day wondering whether they were ever getting back in the side. Then the day finished and they drank. Because I didn't, perhaps I noticed the change more. People relaxed. Something that had felt disastrous two hours earlier became quite funny. The group came back together and cricket gradually disappeared.

Maybe alcohol wasn't simply something cricketers liked doing. Maybe it actually worked. Not in a good way necessarily, but as a coping mechanism. It dulled things. Physical pain, emotional pain, anxiety, insecurity and boredom. If that is part of it, I'm not sure telling players that alcohol is bad for them achieves very much. They know. An international cricketer doesn't need another presentation explaining what alcohol does to sleep and recovery. The interesting thing is that, knowing all of that, some still choose it.

I'm just not sure we put enough effort into the person who has to live with being a cricketer. Where does identity sit in the pathway? Where do values sit? Where do we teach someone how to deal with failure when failure in cricket happens all the time? These aren't soft things. People find ways of coping whether we help them to or not, and if we don't give them good ones, we shouldn't be particularly surprised when they find bad ones.

The Secret Cricket Coach is a former professional cricketer, now an elite-level coach. The charity Mind is available on 0300 123 3393 and Childline on 0800 1111.

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“A giant of a man in every way

Sir Billy Boston
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PA IMAGES

Captain ‘hacked off’

Root reads riot act to England players over off-field conduct

Simon Burnton
Lord’s

Joe Root has spoken of his desire to remodel England’s dressing room into a group that inspires “supporters to look at us and not just revere what we do on the field but off it as well”.

The conduct of the nation’s cricketers has been once again called into question, following the emergence of videos showing Brydon Carse being escorted from a Derby nightclub in handcuffs late on Saturday night.

Joe Root said the players’ code of conduct is not ‘rocket science’ *

Root said he was “hacked off” to be forced once again to address player behaviour, after a string of similar stories over the past eight months. But the England captain repeatedly and pointedly referred to Carse’s misdemeanour, which led to the 31-year-old being arrested briefly on suspicion of being drunk and disorderly before being de-arrested and released without charge, as an “isolated incident”.

Root said: “I’m not trying to sit here and ask people to be saints. I just think that if we don’t put ourselves in certain situations it’s not something we have to worry about.”

The 35-year-old Test captain talked of the unwritten code of conduct by which that players will be expected to abide: “As players you get judged on the decisions you make on the field and off it, too. That’s the world we’re living in. It’s not the isolated incident itself, I think it is the fact that we keep making stupid mistakes away from the game, and it’s detracting from what we’re doing on the field.

“Clearly we’re not portraying ourselves how we want to, and I think we’ve got an opportunity to build a culture that’s very strong, something that’s player-driven. Of course that’s not going to happen overnight. But we want to create something that we can be proud of and people that follow us can be proud of.

“The most important thing is we take this opportunity. We have a chance to build

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Savinho seals Spurs switch and changes name to Sávio

David Hytner

Savinho has completed his £75m move to Tottenham from Manchester City and indicated that he wants to be known from now on as Sávio. The Brazil winger, who will cost up to an additional £10m in add-ons, will have Sávio on the back of his shirt.

The fee represents a record sale for City, who signed him from Troyes in 2024 for £30.8m. The deal takes Spurs’ summer spend to £304.5m and they are not finished. They are close to signing the City forward Omar Marmoush for between £50m and £75m. They are also monitoring Liverpool’s Cody Gakpo.

Roberto De Zerbi, the Spurs head coach, has been keen to add greater punch in his attacking line, a feeling that intensified after the 3-0 defeat at Brentford on the opening weekend of the Premier League season.

Sávio prefers to play off the right wing, where he can cut inside on to his stronger left foot. De Zerbi started the 19-year-old Mikey Moore on the right at Brentford. His other option in the position is Mohammed Kudus, who is “almost ready” to return, according to De Zerbi, from the thigh injury sustained in January.

Sávio had three goals and 13 assists in all competitions in his first season at City, 10 of the latter coming in the Premier League. He was less productive last time out with four goals and three assists in all competitions. In 53 Premier League appearances he has scored twice. “It’s taken a while but I’m very happy to be here,” the 22-year-old told the Spurs website.

“As soon as I spoke to the head coach I knew I had to come. He told me he wants to help me reach the highest level, and I believe we can do that together, as a team.”

Sávio is eligible for Tottenham’s Carabao Cup tie at home against Charlton tonight.

Fresh start at Spurs *Page 40* →

▲ *Sávio’s transfer to Tottenham is a record sale for Manchester City*